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CAPTAIN PAUL, The **KENTUCKY MOONSHINER;** Or, The Boy Spy of the Mountains.

BY C. DUNNING CLARK.



EDGAR STEYNE DID NOT AS YET UNDERSTAND HIS DEADLY PERIL; BUT FIVE MINUTES LATER, HE BECAME CONSCIOUS THAT THE STAKE UPON WHICH HE WAS BOUND, WAS SLOWLY BUT SURELY SINKING IN A QUICKSAND!

Captain Paul,

THE KENTUCKY MOONSHINER;

OR,

The Boy Spy of the Mountains.

BY C. DUNNING CLARK.

CHAPTER I.

THE MOONSHINERS' CAPTIVE—THE VOTE—DEATH!

"Hist, there!" cried a low voice. "Look out; look out!"

The scene opens upon a mountain side in Kentucky; the time 1874, the place, that section of the State where lawlessness reigns as freely to-day as at any time in the history of the "dark and bloody ground."

In this region dwell, at this day, a class of men who know only the law of the strong hand, and who make their point good at the muzzle of the revolver and the edge of the bowie. Strong men they are, brave to the verge of desperation, but regardless of human life when it comes between them and their wishes.

The signal had come from a narrow pass, which led to a sort of plateau, upon which were assembled a strange and motley group, perhaps sixty in number. From beardless youth to men whose hair was turning gray, each bearing a lawless look upon his face, they huddled together under the rays of the summer moon. Upon each face a stern determination showed itself. All were armed, each carrying a rifle or double-barreled shot-gun, a revolver or two, and the long border knife, which, in its time, had done such bloody work. They had not been long in close conference, when from the pass came the hissing sound which had sounded so ominously in their ears, and each man grasped his weapon, and waited.

"Blas't them!" roared a burly ruffian, whose belt was garnished by a tremendous show of pistols and knives. "Let 'em come; we will make 'em wish they'd never troubled the Moonshine Men."

"Dry up!" replied a stern voice. "Let's see what becomes of this. Lay out, there, boys, and find who it is that dares to interfere with the Moonshine Men in council."

There was a sudden scattering among the men upon the plateau, and, as if by magic, they disappeared, crawling like snakes through the low mountain scrub. Half an hour of ominous silence followed, and then the silence was broken by the sudden crack of a pistol, followed by four or five shots in rapid succession; then a triumphant yell from the pass, and the whole desperate band came hustling back, dragging among them a captive, who, although hampered by half a dozen men, still continued to struggle desperately.

"Bring him on!" roared the burly ruffian who had made such a walking arsenal of himself. "Lemme git at him; lemme walk over him as the potatoe bug climbs the green stalk of the Irishman's joy; lemme bite his derved ear off!"

"You'd better be quiet, Bully Bill," said one of the men who was leading the prisoner. "You infernal skulk, where were you when he was laying out Eph Timms and Nat Slyck?"

"Where was I, hey? Don't you know I was just drawin' the finest kind of a bead on him, when—"

"That's enough," said the man who seemed to be a leader among these lawless men. "Bring him forward, quick; I want to see what kind of a man this is who dares to put his head into the jaws of the lion."

"Do you call yourself a lion, Paul Forsythe?" said the prisoner. "Look at me, then, if you want to know me!"

The Captain, with an eager cry, sprung forward, and looked the prisoner closely in the face, and as he recognized him a wild cry of delight sprung to his lips.

"Edgar Steyne!" he cried. "Now, by Heaven! I've had good luck and bad in my life, but this atones for the worst of all. I'd have given all my earthly hopes for such a chance as this, curse you! What have you to hope for, you accused spy?"

"I am not a spy," replied the prisoner, boldly. "I am a United States Deputy Marshal, engaged in the discharge of my duty; and I warn all here assembled that the time has gone by when such men can work their will in the mountains of Kentucky."

"You'll find it different, my boy," retorted

Captain Forsythe, in a grim tone. "What d'ye say, boys, can any hound of the Government come and go at his will in the places where the Minions of the Moon hold sway?"

A wild derisive shout was the only answer, and many fierce eyes were fixed on the prisoner in a way that boded little good to him. As for the prisoner, he stood there with a smile upon his face, giving his captors interest upon the savage looks they bent upon him. Knives glittered, the sharp snap of pistol-locks could be heard, but he did not quail. He was a young man of the true Southern type, with high patrician features, long, curling hair, and drooping mustache. His lips had a proud curl as his eyes rested upon his captors, and it was plain that whatever fate was in store for him, he would meet it like a man.

"Here!" cried the Captain, sternly, telling off four men. "You stand guard over the prisoner. If he makes a break give it to him."

"You bet ye!" responded one of the guards. "I ain't got no love for Uncle Sam's pups."

"Come around me, men," commanded the Captain, as he sprung upon a bowlder. "What I've got to say I can say in a very few words. You know that we have put ourselves outside the law, and that the United States minions will show us no mercy. You see that man, don't you—Colonel Edgar Steyne, of the Twenty-second? You knew him in the service—a martinet, a stickler for the rules of the service—the man who had two of his own regiment shot because they overstepped the rules of the regiment."

"They murdered an old man for a few paltry dollars," declared the prisoner.

"Let it go at that," retorted the speaker. "I was in his regiment, too, and I was cashiered and driven out of the service in disgrace by his means."

"You were a thief. You were paymaster of the regiment and stole the men's pay," declared the prisoner, quietly.

"You would do well to be quiet, and let me finish. When the war was over this man took service under the General Government. He has hounded our boys for two years. Not less than ten men have fallen by his hand in the course of his traitor business. There is not a man in the country who has not heard of Edgar Steyne and his deeds, and while he lives there is no safety for men who, like us, live by their wits. What shall we do with him?"

"Let him die!" cried one of the men, sternly, while the universal shout which went up told that all were agreed. Steyne never changed his smile of contempt, for he knew well that he would gain nothing by "weakening."

"I see that you are all agreed, my boys," announced Forsythe. "No matter what he may have been before, he is our enemy now, and as such, let us send him where he can never trouble us again. Now, who will be the executioner?"

"I claim him!" hissed a sullen-faced, dark-haired Corn-cracker. "You 'uns never knowed him as I do, or hated him so. This ain't the first time I knowed Ed Steyne, kernel of the 22d Kentucky, an' when I see him, my blood begins to bile. One of them men he had shot for shetting off the wind of that old pilgrim on the Mobile was my brother, an' I've hunted him many a long day, but I never hed the chance afore now. Give him to me!"

"I bile in, too," cried another man, stepping to the front. "Go down thar in the pass an' you'll find Eph Timms, stretched out by this yer snoozer; and I'm bound to see his blood."

"Look out what you are doing, men!" said Steyne, undauntedly.

"We'll stand the rackets. There ain't a man here that ain't laid himself liable to the laws. And, when we get done with you, unless there's a squealer here, no man kin tell whar your bones ar' laid."

"Where do you mean to put him, boys?" asked the Captain.

"I'll whisper it," replied the Cracker; "an' then ef the rest was on the rack they couldn't tell what we done with him."

The Captain bent his head while the man whispered in his ear, and Forsythe uttered a hoarse laugh.

"It is well!" he said. "Away with him to his doom!"

CHAPTER II.

THE QUICKSAND—A HORRIBLE DANGER.

"Hold on, boys," called out Edgar, calmly. "I'd like to say a word before you give me up to these men. I've been a soldier, and as a soldier have learned to look death in the face, and I am not going to blench now; but I tell you fairly that I am not the only one who

knows of this meeting, and my death will surely be avenged."

"We'll take the chances," returned Forsythe. "Off with him, my brave boys, and if you put him where you said, they will have to find a large posse comitatus to receive the body."

"I want him gagged," said the Cracker. "Hal! take care!"

Steyne made a sudden leap and broke loose from his captors, and instantly they flew right and left, leveled by the blows of his powerful fists. The might of a giant seemed to come into his arms, with unheard of strength he dashed them aside, and broke through. A dozen weapons sprung out at once as he turned to plunge into the bushes, when a huge bearded Texan sprung suddenly to the front, there came a whistling sound, and the loop of a lariat settled over the head of the flying man, while the triumphant "whoop" of the Texan rent the air.

"Got him thet time, dern his hide," he yelled. "Jump on him, boys."

A dozen men leaped upon the prostrate man, and he was quickly bound and gagged.

"Blame my cats ef I didn't think he'd get cl'ar," cried the Cracker. "Set him on his pins, boys; he's my meat now. Loose up on his feet so thet he kin step out a leetle, but not so thet he kin leg it. That'll do, thet's right. Now, my sweet-scented flower, come this way. Prick him with a bowie ef he lags, Jim."

The two passed away down the mountain gorge, leading the prisoner with them. He had given up all hope of escape, for the revengeful nature of the sallow North Carolinian looked out of his small, deep-set, twinkling eyes; and he knew that the man would not give up his chance of sweet revenge. Slowly and painfully he toiled down the mountain-pass for a distance of nearly a mile when they came down into a sheltered valley, hemmed in on every hand by high hills and into which a small stream found its way, seeming to sink out of sight in the patch of green which showed in the center of the open space. Upon the edge of this green spot stood a leaning tree, with one long branch stretching across the grass.

"A likely place," chuckled the Cracker. "Now, Jim; watch out while I cut a stake."

He turned aside from the pass, and soon the sound of chopping was heard and he quickly came back, carrying a pole about five inches through, and pointed at one end. Setting this against the tree, he made the prisoner lie down upon his face and the two strapped the pole tightly to his back, winding the lariat again and again about him, until he was utterly helpless. Then, by their united strength, they managed to raise the pole so that one end reached nearly to the middle of the patch of green, and the other rested against the long limb of which we have spoken, leaving the pole in a nearly upright position. Then the two climbed the tree, and while one of them held the pole in an upright position the other struck it several heavy blows with a club, and at each blow it seemed to sink a foot into the treacherous green spot. At last the pole seemed to stand steady, and Edgar Steyne hung suspended in the air, helpless, and unable to utter a cry.

"Thet job's done," cried the Cracker, with a savage laugh. "Kernel Steyne, d'ye know what's gwine ter happen? Well, you watch out, an' you'll see."

The two sat down beneath the tree and waited. Soon a pack of cards was produced, and under the light of the moon, now sailing high in the heavens, the two abandoned wretches began a game in the very jaws of death.

"Now look yer, Jim, my boy," said the Cracker. "I'm a-gwine ter flax ye like thunder. I ain't got my ekal in this yer little game of draw in the State of Kentuck."

"Don't be so oppinionated, Sol, my sweet youth. Put up yer ducks and see how I rake 'em down. My deal, eh? I'll flax ye."

Edgar Steyne looking down upon this strange game, did not as yet understand his deadly peril, and actually, for the moment, became interested in the game. But, five minutes later, he became conscious that the stake upon which he was bound was slowly but surely sinking under his weight, and the awful truth burst upon him. The foot of the stake was planted in a quicksand! It was only a question of time, and his doom was sealed!

The marshal was a brave man. A hundred times before, he had faced death upon the field of battle, and faced it gallantly. But such a death as this, suspended between heaven and earth, sinking slowly but surely to his death in the slime below! It was awful.

And what added to a measure to the terrors

of his situation was the fact that he was helpless. His lips were dumb; he could not even cry for help.

Slowly but surely, inch by inch he sunk into the yielding sand, while the two men continued their horrible game.

"Gimme that Jack!" called out the Cracker, laying down the king. "You won't? Then put it on the ace. That's right; allus do what is right and you will be respected by all who know you."

He cast an upward glance at the silent figure above him as he spoke, and a grin of satisfied malice passed over his face.

"I'd like it better if he could yell, Jim," he said. "What do you say if we let up on the gag?"

"I'd like to hear him beg for his life, the dog," replied Jim. "I'm agreeable; off with the gag."

The stake had descended so rapidly that the feet of the imprisoned man already touched the yielding sand. The Cracker stepped out lightly, lifting his feet repeatedly to keep from sinking deeper, and cut the gag loose from the mouth of the prisoner.

"Thar," he said, "yell if you want to; give it mouth."

"If you have cut me loose with the idea that I will beg for my life from such degraded wretches as you, then you do not know Edgar Steyne. No; it's a pleasure to me, if I must die, to die with my eyes open."

At this moment there came a quick step and a man entered the opening. At a glance it was plain that he was rough and ready; a genuine mountain man. A huge gray beard descended on his breast, and although he was past the middle period of life, there was much of vitality still remaining in his huge frame. He carried the traditional Kentucky rifle, a long, ponderous weapon, which he threw into the hollow of his arm as he stopped and looked at the prisoner, with his small, twinkling eyes.

"Uncomfortable kind of a fix, stranger," he said. "Now who be you?"

"Edgar Steyne, United States Deputy Marshal. I am being murdered by these villains," was the prompt response.

"An' who be they?"

"The Moonshine Men!" cried Jim Bailey, in a terrible voice. "Pass on your way, old man; you have nothing to do here."

"You don't know me, I reckon," responded the mountaineer. "I'm Rube Burley, Old Rube of the mountains, you see. I don't skeer, not to speak on, an' I don't reckon I 'pass' with a sent unless I know what I pass fur. Now I ask you what that man is trussed up fur?"

"I donno as it's any of your business, pard," growled the Cracker, laying his hand upon a revolver. "Nat'rally I'm mild an' easy, but rile me an' I'm p'izen. I rare up orful, them times."

"Don't rair 'round me too much, 'cause I won't stand it," warned the mountaineer. "An' see yer, put down your hand. It makes me nervous to see a man handling a weepoon that way."

As he spoke he threw forward his long rifle, with an ominous click of the lock. By this time Jim Bailey was on his feet, with a rifle in his hand, but he did not cock it, for he did not like the flash in the eyes of the mountain man. He saw that, old as he was, Rube meant business. There were but few in this part of Kentucky who did not know something of the "Old Man of the Mountains." At every shooting-match, fair, or horse-race his sinewy figure could be seen moving about, his long rifle at his shoulder, ready to "take the starch" out of any youngster who started a bragging match. His prowess with the weapon was remarkable, and there was not a man in Kentucky who was his equal with the rifle. Woe to the one whom he faced in anger, when he looked through the double sights! Jim Bailey hesitated, for he did not care to face the firm eyes of the old mountaineer.

"Now don't b'lie in, old man," he said; "we don't want to hurt you—"

"Hurt nothin'!" replied old Rube. "I ain't the least afraid, you see."

"We've got a private quarrel to settle with this yer spy," explained the Cracker. "He had my brother shot."

"D'ye say that?"

"Yes."

"Will he say it?"

"He dare not deny it."

"Then, when a brother takes vengeance on the man thet killed his brother, Old Rube kain't b'lie in. Night, night, boys! I must be a-trot-tin'." Sorry, stranger, but I kain't interfere."

And swinging his rifle over his shoulder, he started away at a rapid lope, paying no heed to the calls of the doomed man at the stake.

"I didn't think he'd take water," said the Cracker, with a savage laugh. "Reckon you are done for, pard."

And the two sat down again, while the quicksand rose higher, until it almost reached the waist of the marshal.

Slowly, slowly, inch by inch, the stake sunk into the unknown depths of the quicksand. That determined face, even in this hour of mortal peril, did not change. There was a superb smile upon his lips as the rays of the moon fell upon it, and then—

"Hooray, there, you!" cried a boyish voice. "What is all this?"

A slight boy, mounted upon a sleek-limbed hunter, had come suddenly into the pass. A devil-may-care boy, dressed in a neat hunting rig, with a lariat on the saddle-bow. His head was crowned by short clustering curls, upon which a low-crowned sombrero was jauntily set. He glanced quickly from side to side, but in that quick glance he had taken in everything.

"I say, boys, what's the fun?" he demanded, in a cheery voice. "Haven't you got done with that fellow yet?"

"Who are you?" growled the Cracker, in a surly tone.

"No matter who I am, my dear Moonshiner. I don't see that it matters to you in the least, as long as I know all about the meetings of the Moonshine Men in the pass. I'm fly, you understand, if I am small. Little, but good, that's my character, for—"

"That's enough, anyhow," interrupted the Cracker. "Whack up your nag and go on about your business."

"I wouldn't have your temper for anything in the world," exclaimed the boy, with a light laugh. "Now, see here; I'm a quiet sort of a little chap, but I don't take a back seat for any North Carolina man who ever cracked corn, you bet your life! These mountains are free, I reckon."

"To the Moonshine Men, but to no others," answered Jim Bailey, gruffly. "You'd better heed what the Cracker says, and touch up your horse and ride on. It will be the safer for you."

"But I like to know about these things, stranger! When I see a man trussed up over a quicksand in that way, it sends shivers all through me. What has he done?"

"None of your business. Dry up, and go on!"

The boy slipped his hand into a sort of pouch in the saddle, and looked at the speaker with a peculiar gleam in his eyes. The man started and laid his hand upon a weapon, but seeing that the boy did not show a pistol, he dropped his hand.

"By hokey!" he said. "For half a minute I thought the little cuss was on the shoot. Now I don't make it a point to waste time quarreling with children; I haven't got time, so clear out!"

"And suppose I don't clear, what then?"

"Then I propose to lace your hide with a hickory until you wish you were at home with your mother."

"It isn't right for you to try to scare a little fellow like me!" demurred the boy. "Don't you see that man sinks deeper every moment? He'll choke soon."

"I did have some such idea," was the response, accompanied by a look of malicious hatred. "Now you go on, that's a good boy, and let us alone."

"Why don't you pull him out?"

"We ain't strong enough. It would take a great deal of force to pull him out, and I feel a little tired."

"But you don't want to kill him, man?"

"Oh, go long, you little cuss," snarled Bailey. "We can't fool with you all day, and you've spoilt our game now."

The hand of the boy sprung suddenly from the pouch in which it was buried, and to the utter surprise of the Moonshiners, the barrel of a Colt Navy looked them in the face.

"Don't wag a finger, boys," he said, in his light, easy tone. "If you do, well, you'll get acquainted with me, as sure as you live."

"Dog on you, what d'ye want?" roared the Cracker, beginning to raise his pistol.

Crack!

The weapon dropped from the hand which held it, and the Carolinian reeled back with a broken arm.

"Now I don't want to hurt any one if I can help it," cried the boy; "but, if you offer to move, I'll give it to you. I want that man taken out of that."

"You'll be hung for a fool!"

"Now don't, boys, don't! When you talk in that way you really hurt my feelings. Come, be lively! That man is sinking deeper, and, as a preliminary measure, I want you to drop that shooter."

And the revolver came down promptly.

CHAPTER III.

SUDDEN DEATH—OLD MAN RUBE TO THE RESCUE—MARIAN LYNN.

BAILEY saw that the boy had the "drop," and the specimen which he had already given of his shooting cowed him. The rifle dropped at his feet, and the two stepped back, the Cracker carefully holding his injured arm. The boy, still sitting quietly in the saddle, kept following them with the revolver as they moved back, so that any attempt to draw a weapon could be promptly met.

"I've only got one life to live, and you are wasting my time," the boy said, in a low, stern voice. "I give you just one minute to get him out of that, or begin the work."

Jim was a man open to persuasion, and at a glance he saw that the boy was in deadly earnest.

"I've got to use my knife to cut the fellow loose," he cried.

"All right," responded the boy, drawing a bowie with his left hand and tossing it to the speaker. "There is a knife for you."

Bailey stooped and picked up the knife, and sprung out upon the quicksand with the weapon gleaming in his hand. He reached the side of the prisoner, and with a fierce yell raised the blade on high.

"Shoot, if you dare!" he cried. "I'll live long enough to bury it in his heart."

A whip-like crack sounded through the mountain gorge, and a thin smoke, which rose slowly from the rocks to the right, shewed whence the shot had come. Jim Bailey threw up his hands and fell dead before the man he would have murdered. The boy bounded from his saddle and sprung forward, when he saw the Old Man of the Mountain running down the pass with his rifle on his shoulder.

"Thet thief lied!" he shouted. "I see it now, and I'm glad he's got his gruel. Now see here, Sol, don't you stir, or I'll cook you in the same sauce, lively. Watch him, my boy, an' I'll hev the kernel out of that."

At this moment the Cracker raised his fingers to his lips, and sent a long, peculiar whistle ringing through the gorge. Old Rube, with a sounding oath, struck him down with the butt of his rifle, and he lay senseless and bleeding on the earth.

The old man did not hesitate, but, springing into the quicksand, he made one end of the lariat, which hung at the saddle-bow of the boy, fast to the stake.

"Jump back into the saddle, boy," he cried. "We've got to snake him out of that, lively, or the cussid Moonshiners will be down on us before we know where we live."

The boy leaped into the saddle and spoke to the horse. He bent forward; the muscles on his chest stood out like ropes, and then the stake came slowly out of the quicksand, and Edgar Steyne was dragged to a place of safety on the bank. The knife of the old man quickly set him free, and he sprung to his feet with a joyous shout.

"Thank you, boy!" he cried. "Ah, here is a rifle."

He darted forward and caught up the rifle which had fallen from the hand of Jim Bailey, and took a revolver from the belt of the Cracker, satisfying himself at a glance that the chambers were full.

"Now, don't fool, stranger!" cried Old Rube. "Them Moonshine Men will be right clust on the signal of the Cracker. Jump up behind the boy an' away you go."

The gallant marshal laughed aloud.

"Do you think I would go and leave you here to face them alone?"

"Bless yer innocent heart, kernel, I ain't going to stay hyar. I'm off like a hunted stag immediately, an' to once. I'll meet you to-night at the old tavern in Bentleyville, and we'll talk it over."

"All right; go ahead!"

He leaped upon the crupper of the hunter, which instantly bounded away, not seeming to feel the double load, while Old Rube darted into a side pass and was out of sight. They were not a moment too soon, for footsteps began to sound upon the rocks, and half a dozen men came in sight, hurrying down the pass toward the unconscious form of Sol Tibbits. Wild cries of rage were heard as they took in the situation of affairs.

"That's what always happens when you take such chances, Captain Forsythe," cried one of the men. "Two more good boys gone to glory, and nothing to show for it."

"You must not blame me," replied Forsythe. "by the gods, I'd give my right hand, this minute, to see Ed Steyne standing here before me as he stood an hour ago. But he shall not escape."

"Pshaw!" replied the other, testily. "Listen a moment, will you?"

The talking stopped, and in the distance they heard the rapid beat of horses' hoofs.

"He's had help from some source," said Forsythe; "so you see that the boys were not to blame. By the sound I should say that they were making for Bentleyville."

"So it seems."

"Then we know where to find our game, old fellow. And if, after all this, we allow Ed Steyne to live, we are the only ones to blame. I, for one, am going to Bentleyville to-morrow."

"Better not. You are too well known and we've got plenty of men who can do the work just as well, and who would not be suspected."

"I don't know but you are right," admitted Forsythe. "Now let us look after these poor fellows, and lay our plans afterward."

Jim Bailey was found to be quite dead, shot through the head. Sol Tibbitts still breathed, although his arm was broken, and he had received a terrible blow.

"We won't move Jim," announced the Captain. "He will rest as well under the quicksand as he would in the cemetery at the village. There are none who care enough for him to ask where he has gone."

This was his epitaph!

While the others were taking care of Sol Tibbitts and preparing to carry him away, Captain Forsythe stooped and picked up the knife which the boy had thrown at the feet of Jim Bailey. At first he gave it a careless glance; then he uttered a cry of surprise, and looked closely at some letters engraven on the haft.

"By heaven," he cried; "if I thought it possible! But no; it cannot be! Hurry up, boys; make a litter and take Sol to the cave. Be careful of him, for there is plenty of work in him yet. Cal, you and I must go together."

The man addressed, a young fellow with a dark, savage-looking face, with straight Indian hair, at once followed him. The two descended the pass at a rapid run, and at the end of two hours, just at daybreak, came to a rude cabin which was built in the very shadow of the rocky sides of the pass. An old negro, with dim, bleared eyes, and a half idiotic look, was seated on a log, shaping an ax-helve.

"Hi there, daddy!" cried Forsythe. "Did you see any horsemen pass this way?"

"See 'em pass! Fo' de Laud, yes! Dey gwine rushing down yer like dey was gwine crazy, dey did! Nebber bin see sech foolishness in all my life."

"Who were they?"

"Dar's my dog Bounce, see dar—dat ornery cuss wid fo' white legs; he bin jist sabe he life, cappen, fo' de gracious."

"Daddy, if you don't tell me who you saw, I'll be the death of you."

"Two men on one hoss, dat's what I see'd," replied the negro.

"Did you know them?"

"Know Kernel Steyne, he dat sot behind; dummo de udder one. He was a durned, ornery, little white trash to go a-roarin' an' cavortin' over a po' ole nigger's dog."

"It was a man, then?"

"Deed it was, Massa Cappen. I don't tell you no lies, ole as I be. Nebber see dat young feller in all my life."

"I'm on the wrong trail, I reckon," averred the Captain, "but for a minute I was ready to swear that she had something to do with it. If I thought she had, I don't know but I would be tempted to murder her. Where is my horse, Daddy?"

"Tied behind de house, marse," answered the old negro. "I get 'em out."

He hobbled around the cabin and quickly appeared, leading by the bridle two splendid horses—for most Kentuckians are well mounted. The two sprang into the saddles, and setting in their spurs, rode at their best pace. Half an hour later they came out into a beautiful valley, and in the distance a small village could be seen. But they did not design to go there, and turned their horses into a side road. An hour later they drew rein before an old stone house, which, in its day, had been a beautiful mansion.

Forsythe leaped from the saddle and ran up

the steps, when the door opened and a girl came out quickly.

"Ah, Captain!" she said; "I am glad to see you."

"I can say the same to you, Marian," replied the Captain, "when you have given me a plain answer to one question: when did you see Ed Steyne?"

"About an hour ago."

His face darkened visibly, and his hands were clenched.

"Do you dare to tell me that you have met him, and that it was through you that he escaped?"

"I don't know what you are talking about," she said. "Edgar Steyne rode by the house, as I said, about an hour ago, in company with a young fellow whom I do not think you know; a pretty boy he was, too—a stranger in these parts."

"Do you see this?" cried the Captain, drawing the knife which he had picked up at the quicksand.

"Where did you find that?" she demanded, quickly. "I have not seen it for I don't know how long; that is, if it is my knife."

"It is; your initials are on the handle."

"Then you must have stolen it, as you were always threatening to do. Give it to me immediately, sir. I will teach you to take possession of my property in that way, because it happens to suit you."

"Then you do not know where I found this, Marian?"

"I know that you are in a strange mood to-day, Captain; you had better ride on, and to-morrow you may be in better humor, perhaps. Ed Steyne said something about the races to-morrow; do you go? I said I would enter May Bird and beat him over the course."

"You can do it if you like, Marian," he said, eagerly. "If you only would beat that upstart, you would do me a favor for which I should never cease to be thankful. Will you enter May Bird to please me?"

"I would do more than that for you, Paul," she said, softly. "Do not fear that Edgar Steyne can ever come between you and me, for that can never be. But, why do you hate him so? He seems to me to be a pleasant man as he certainly is a brave one."

"You will never know, perhaps, what cause I have to hate Colonel Edgar Steyne. It is not so much that he is a hound of the Government and takes its pay to hunt down better men than himself, but for another cause which I will never tell to you. May the time come when he and I may meet in a place where none can come between us! He escaped me to-day, but luck will not always be on his side."

"Enough said, then! If he is your enemy, and it will do you any good to see him beaten, I will enter May Bird and ride as if my life depended on her speed. And you know that there is nothing to equal her, even in the Blue Grass."

They entered the house together and at a signal from the Captain his companion rode on his way. But there was work to be done at the race-course in the village, and Edgar Steyne did not know how dark a plot was being hatched against him by the men whom he had sworn to hunt down, as in the cool of the morning he rode down to the race-course, where the people were already assembled for a day of sport.

CHAPTER IV.

AT THE RACES—THE BEATEN WRESTLER—MAY BIRD AND MARIAN.

THE races at Bentleyville, as in all towns of that size in Kentucky or any other southern State, drew together men from all the surrounding country. They came in at early morning, generally attended by their families, with here and there two or three riding on one horse. Strange groups there were, with negroes of all hues, from the darkest ebony to the color of a new saddle; for even to this day the negroes clung to and swear by the old families. The course was a rough one, and there was some hard riding to be done before either horse could reach the winning post.

An hour before the start Captain Forsythe, with half a dozen of his cronies at his back, sauntered on to the grounds. They did not show any weapons, but no one doubted for a moment that they were armed to the teeth, and literally spoiling for a fray.

It might be asked why, knowing them to be guilty, Edgar Steyne did not have them arrested on the spot. Simply for the reason that no one would have backed him in any such proceeding except his own immediate adherents;

for, as a rule, the "natives" of that section back the "Moonshiners," and rather glory in their resisting the laws of the General Government. No one knew this better than the marshal, and he only cast a quiet look at the party as they came in the course, and then looked at the Old Man Rube, who was leaning against the judges' stand, coolly looking at him, and waiting for the sport to begin.

"Say, kernel," he said, "did I understand you to say you was agoin' to ride this race yourself?"

"Yes, I am; going to win it too."

"A hundred to fifty against Brown Molly," cried Captain Forsythe, at this moment. "Who is game to back the mare?"

"I," replied Edgar, stepping forward. "I take that bet in hundreds; a thousand to five hundred will be your bet unless you are 'bluffing.'"

"I don't bluff, Colonel Steyne," was the sneering reply. "Put up your money in any safe hands."

"What do you say to Major Binks?"

"He'll do; here, major."

A red-faced, hearty looking man, who was crossing the track, turned and came back.

"Understand my bet, major," said the Captain. "I bet one thousand dollars against five hundred that the mare Brown Molly, owned and ridden by Colonel Steyne, does not win or tie this race."

"It is a bet," said Steyne, putting up his money, which was promptly covered by Forsythe. "And I will do my best to make you lose your cash."

"There is no love lost between us, it seems to me," added the Captain. "You and I would be happy if we could meet face to face for half an hour, there to decide which is the better man."

"The time may come sooner than you look for, Forsythe," was the firm reply. "I shall not be happy until I have hunted your infamous band to earth, and taught the people of this region what a nest of scoundrels you are."

"I ought to draw on you here, and end it," hissed the Captain, "but I prefer to make you lose your money first. The race is not called until three o'clock, and until then, take care of yourself!"

He sauntered away with a sinister smile upon his face, and the marshal half started to follow him, when the hand of the old hunter dropped upon his shoulder.

"It won't do, I tell you, kernel. You jest listen to the old man this time, an' you won't be sorry for it in the arter days. A tough cuss, he is, but you an' me kin cut his comb if we only take it easy. Let your boys keep well together, for you kaint tell what time we'll hev a lively muss. I've spotted ten of them skunks already, an' afore the race is done you'll see more of 'em, you take my word."

They crossed the grounds at an easy pace and reached a part of the course where, upon a patch of greensward, a party of men had started a wrestling match. One man, a perfect giant in stature, with a heavy, forbidding face, had already overthrown several of the best wrestlers, and stood flapping his arms like a victorious rooster, and calling for some one else to come and take a hug with him.

"I am more than half inclined to take the style out of that fellow," said Edgar, in a low voice, addressed to Old Rube.

"I dunno, kernel. He's a tough colt to ride, that Abe Farney—one of Captain Forsythe's best men. I reckon you'd better pass."

"Who is game to try the spurs of the big rooster of the Ohio?" bawled the Goliath. "Come, my children; I'll lay you down so gently you won't know that I have touched you. Has all the style gone out of this 'burg, that I can't find a man to face me? Don't they raise any more game birds in the Blue Ridge?"

Edgar Steyne quietly threw off his coat and stepped into the ring. There came into the small, bead-like eyes of the stout ruffian an evil glitter, and any one could see he had found the adversary for whom he had been looking.

"I'll try and prove to you that they raise some men in this county yet, my robust friend," said Edgar, returning his fierce glance with an undaunted look.

"Seems to me some one said you was going to ride a race to-day, kernel," said Abe Farney.

"If you are, I guess you'd better draw out."

"I'll be on hand to ride my race, all the same," was the quiet reply. "What is this to be?"

"Catch as catch can," was the reply. "I don't reckon you'll want to ride when I am done with you."

"He will have it, Abe," said the sneering

voice of Captain Forsythe, from the edge of the circle. "A hundred dollars to ten that Abe puts him on his back."

"I ain't much on the bet, stranger," cried Old Rube, "but that's a good bet if I lose. Put up the ducats."

The money was hardly up when the two men rushed at each other, and each struggled to get the advantage of the hold. When they clenched, and were fairly settled on their feet, all saw that, if anything, the colonel had the best of the hold, for his arms were under those of the giant; and they saw, too, as they stood locked together, a look of quiet decision on the face of the lighter man which gave those who were tempted to back him confidence; and the odds proffered by Forsythe and his companions were freely taken.

"Either this yer gang is going back to the mountains bu'sted or they rake all my stumps," yelled Old Rube, as he flourished a greasy shotgun about his head. "Yaas, I take thet bet, 'oo; any more of the same sort?"

But the bets were not now so freely offered, as they saw that the colonel was still firm upon his feet and did not show any disposition to go down easily. Twice the great strength of Abe Farney had enabled him to bend his slighter adversary almost to the earth, but he could not get his feet from the ground or break his hold. As many times they had seen the giant stagger and only recover himself by a mighty effort, and the excitement became maddening. Five minutes had passed, and Farney began to show signs of weariness, and Edgar was as fresh as a daisy. He put on a toe lock which staggered the giant again, and before he could recover his heels flew into the air, and he came down upon the earth with a resounding bump, fairly thrown, amid the wild cheers of the partisans of Steyne, and the yells of rage from the lips of Forsythe's gang.

With a roar like a mad bull Abe Farney bounded from the earth and made a wild rush at his adversary, but a dozen men rushed between.

"Fair play here!" cried a tall Kentuckian. "Settle these bets first, and then, if you want another chance the colonel will give it to you."

Knives were half drawn and an encounter seemed inevitable, when the voice of Steyne was heard.

"Get out of the way, boys!" he said, "let the fellow get at me if he is crazy for it. I'm his equal in any way he may choose."

"It was a trick!" shouted Forsythe. "He did not wrestle fairly, as half-a-dozen here are ready to swear."

"Settle the bets!" persisted the Kentuckian. "I say it was a fair thing all through, and I'll back the kernel to do the trick again, at even money, with any one who dares to sound his loud timbrel!"

Forsythe saw that nothing else would do, and he gave the signal to his men, who quietly surrendered the stakes. Then the champions of fair play stepped aside, and the two men again faced each other.

"Wait a moment," said Steyne, raising his hand. "That man has got a knife and pistols, and in his present temper I object to meeting him while he has those weapons. Let him lay them down and I'll give him all the satisfaction he wants."

Abe Farney threw his weapons aside, and doubling his huge fists, advanced quickly shouting:

"You said that you'd meet me in any way. Meet me with these, then."

"See here, my man!" cried the colonel. "Is that what you call wrestling? It looks to me more like a prize fight, and I don't like it."

"You can't sneak out of it!" roared Abe, continuing his advance. "Don't think it."

"Come on, then, if you will have it!" was the quiet reply. "I'll give you a lesson which you will not soon forget."

On came the huge ruffian, throwing out his arms like the sails of a windmill. For a moment Edgar gave ground, and then there was a sudden leap, a lightning-like blow, and they saw the huge body of the giant extended on the earth, motionless as if dead.

"That will do!" said Edgar, quietly. "You set this man on me, Captain Forsythe, and I hope that you are satisfied with the result."

For a moment Forsythe stood with his hand thrust into his hip-pocket, ready to draw a weapon, but he was too wary to draw yet. He saw that nearly all the crowd now present would back the colonel, and that he would be overmatched, and he was far too wise a man to lose all by being too precipitate.

"I'll make you answer for that in another

place, Ed Steyne, but you must see that this is no place for a quarrel."

"Because the odds are not all on your side," was the quiet reply. "Take care of that big brute, then, and don't let him come in my way again to-day or I'll put a mark on him that he'll bear to the day of his death. Come on, Rube!"

He threw on his coat and walked away, with the old hunter following at his heels. As they approached the judges' stand a light-limbed hunter came sailing over the rail with the lightness of a bird, and a sweet voice cried:

"There you are, colonel. I have kept my word, and have come to match May Bird against Brown Molly."

It was Marian Lynn, the girl who had met Forsythe in the old mansion on the preceding day.

CHAPTER V.

THE RACE—ABE FARNEY'S SACRIFICE—A DEAD HEAT.

"Gosh all Jerusalem!" cried Old Rube. "Ain't she a bu'ster!"

The rude admiration of the old man was well called for. Of a slight, symmetrical figure, swaying to and fro with the motion of her horse, with glorious dark eyes and short curling hair, crowned by a stunning jockey, small hands and feet, a face which might well have driven men mad, Marian Lynn was glorious.

"I hope you won't do it, Marian," the young man said. "My honor is at stake if I do not win this race, and I shall ride for my life."

"So be it, colonel!" was the reply. "I would sooner die than see May Bird beaten, but may the best win; that is all I can say."

"I wish you would not take part in the race."

"I must, Edgar Steyne," she answered. "Nothing would tempt me to draw out."

At this moment the bell rung, and the colonel sprang away to look for his horse. And when he rode up to the judges' stand, to his sorrow the girl was by his side, ready for the race.

The motley groups about the fair ground surged in toward the judges' stand, as the bell rung, and a cheer went up as they saw the girl take her place among the riders, for in Kentucky, it is rather looked upon as a mark of great merit to be able to ride well. There was hardly a man or boy in this section who did not know both of these blood mares, one of which was morally sure to win the race. It was two miles and a half, over broken ground with natural water-jumps, deep gullies and heavy stone fences; for the hurdle-race is the race *par excellence* in this part of Kentucky.

"Back to your places!" cried the starter, as he took his place above them. "Be ready to start at the tap of the bell. Fall back there, Nabocolish; come up to your place, Mate Magone! Are you all ready? Go!"

The horses shot away down the quarter-stretch, and at the word Brown Molly drew ahead, with Mate Magone on his quarters, and May Bird a good third. Steyne had thrown off his coat and hat, and appeared in a neat blue Jersey and a red cap.

He was the beau ideal of the practical rider as he sat like a statue in his saddle, swaying slightly to and fro with the motion of his mare, which was running as only she could run, close to the ground, stretched out like a grayhound on a hot scent. The first jump was a wattle fence, and over it went Brown Molly, and here Mate Magone came to grief and went rolling down among the wattles, while May Bird, never swerving from his course, bounded over them. She cleared the fence without a stagger, and was away in close pursuit of Brown Molly, now rapidly nearing the water-jump, a wide creek with high clay banks, at least six feet above the water—a jump which might well turn any hunter.

"Look out how you do it, Ed!" cried the fearless girl. "Ha! I'll show you the way."

"Not yet, Marian!" he cried, touching his mare lightly with his riding-whip. "Go at it, Molly!"

The courageous mare rushed at it with head erect, and at the right moment, bounding like a stag, she fairly lighted on the other side, and the rider, half turning in his saddle, looked back at May Bird. She was coming with a rush, kept well in hand by her rider, and when she rose to the leap and cleared it successfully, a ringing cheer burst from a thousand throats, even those who had money staked upon Brown Molly. But Ed Steyne had gained some forty yards, and at every stride he seemed to gain more and more, although May Bird was going like a rocket, and nothing could exceed the grace and skill with which the girl was managing her.

"Now if that girl loses after all her bragging!" hissed Forsythe, bringing his hand down upon his thigh savagely. "Curse him, oh, curse him! Go among the men, Cal, for I swear to you that if he escapes me now he shall not leave the course alive."

"What do you mean by that, Cap?" drawled Cal Curtiss. "Going to get up a bear-fight?"

"I reckon I just am, if the other plan fails," said the Captain. "It is a matter of life and death to us, for I tell you that we Moonshiners will have no ease or comfort in this part of Kentucky while Ed Steyne is on the course. Oh, but see that mare go!"

"May Bird holds her own, though," said Cal. "The mare no longer leaves her."

"So it seems; but I am afraid that the girl is no match for him in *finesse*. Ed is an old stager on the course."

"Give her credit for what she does, Cap. By heaven, no woman ever stood by a man as she has stood by you, and with as little cause. If she only knew—"

"But you must understand that I will cut out any man's heart who dares to hint to her that I am not what she thinks me. I could lose everything else—money, health, my life even; but when I think of losing her it drives me mad."

"Look, look!" cried Cal, interrupting him suddenly. "By heaven, Brown Molly refuses the sunk fence!"

"Hurrah!" shouted the Captain, as he saw Brown Molly swerve suddenly from her course and bound high into the air. "May Bird will pass her yet."

"The fence was 'a rasper,' formed from the stumps thrown together in confusion, and sunk into a deep gully, fully thirteen feet from side to side, one of the worst jumps on the course. The quick eye of the mare had detected something moving in the hedge, and she had bolted, but the hand of Colonel Steyne met her before she could gather, and the spurs sunk deeply into her sides. She gave a bound like a stag maddened by a sudden wound, and the wild leap fairly shook him in his saddle, although it did not quite unsettle him, and the whip came down upon her quarters just as he lifted her to the leap. She cleared the ragged fence gallantly, and as she did so May Bird was at her side.

"Show the way longer, if you can, Ed Steyne!" cried Marian. "May Bird, my darling, show your courage now."

The brave beast seemed to understand every word spoken, and away she shot like an arrow from a bow. For half a mile they raced side by side, and from the distant crowd the cheering was maddening, for never before had they witnessed such a race. Scarcely any one was looking at the other horses, now left hopelessly in the rear; all eyes were fixed upon the two, running side by side. But there was a reserve of force in Brown Molly which had not yet been called out, and at the right moment Ed Steyne shouted:

"Now, Molly!"

Then they saw the noble beast give a mighty leap which seemed to carry her at a single bound half a length ahead of May Bird. The efforts which the latter had made to overtake her leader had told upon her, too, and loud and long yells arose as the brown mare shot rapidly ahead, and clearing the angle in the creek for the second time, began to cross a marshy meadow which lay in the course, the place to try the courage of the best hunter, for the hoofs sunk into the soft turf at every stride. It was well for her that May Bird for a moment refused the fence and enabled her to pass half over the soft meadow, for, with the lighter burden which she carried, May Bird crossed the soft ground easily, and when Brown Molly passed the swale May Bird was close at her heels, and the cheery voice of Marian rung out upon the air:

"Clear the way there! I am coming now!"

But, Ed only shook his whip above his head, passed a light rail fence before him and headed homeward. Scarce half a mile away lay the goal, and all could see that if the powers of the brown mare had not been too severely tested she could win the race. And Ed Steyne could tell by the sinewy bound of the gallant beast under him that she was all right if he could cross the last leap, the worst of the whole.

He was nearing it now.

The course took him up a stiff ascent and into a valley where a high wattle screen had been raised on the near side of the bank of a deep gully—not very wide, it is true, but the rider could not see what was before him on the other side. Down the descent came the brown mare, spurning the turf with her flying feet, and seeming to make the very earth tremble as she came. Her head was turned toward the wattles,

and she rose for the leap, when, out of the ravine, bounded the huge figure of Abe Farney, made a clutch for the rein, and horse and man went rolling down into the gully.

Marian uttered a wild cry of horror, and realizing that she could do no good upon this side, took the fence at a bound, and instead of continuing the race, turned to look down into the gully.

"Ride on, ride on!" screamed Forsythe, rushing down toward her. "Ten thousand curses! Why do you hesitate?"

"I will not ride on until I know what has happened to Ed Steyne," replied the girl. "Off the course there; I will lay my whip across the face of the man who puts a hand upon my rein until I know. Hal! there he comes."

Ed Steyne appeared, fairly dragging his horse by the bridle, and as he neared the crest of the gully, sprang into the saddle.

"Come with me, Marian," he cried. "The race is yours by right, but if yonder man will search at the bottom of the gully, he will find what is left of his big ruffian. Come on, Marian."

The two darted away again, side by side, almost touching each other as they rode, while cheer upon cheer burst from the throats of the spectators as the two mares came dashing in exactly neck and neck, and crossed the line in that position. And there was some confusion in the judge's stand, a Babel of voices on all sides, loud cries for a decision, and a mighty cheer rolled up as the board was hung out with the words:

"A dead heat!"

CHAPTER VI.

ANOTHER TEST OF STRENGTH.

THE decision of the judges had scarcely been recorded when there was an ominous movement among the partisans of Captain Forsythe, and Edgar Steyne, at a single glance, saw that it was time for him to show his hand. Forsythe's men had leaped down into the gully, and there found Abe Farney crushed out of the semblance of humanity by the fall of the horse, and the word passed among them to make this an excuse for vengeance upon the marshal. Men were running about among the crowd, calling on them to take revenge for the death of Abe Farney, and Forsythe himself, accompanied by Cal Curtiss, was seen hurrying across the ground, and at every step he was joined by some man armed to the teeth, and breathing out threatening and slaughter.

Marion Lynn saw the threatened tumult, and urging her horse, she met the angry crowd as they advanced toward the judges' stand.

"What does this mean, Paul Forsythe?" she cried. "Do you tell me that, after such a vile attempt as this, in which Abe Farney met a well-deserved doom, you incite these men to take vengeance upon Colonel Steyne?"

"Look you, girl," said Forsythe. "I have more than half-suspected you before of having a deeper interest in this man than you would acknowledge, and now I am certain of it."

"Out of the way, girl, out of the way!" cried Curtiss, waving his revolver above his head. "Get into a place of safety as soon as you can, for there is going to be one of the biggest rows you ever heard of."

"I will not get out of the way," she cried, in a clear, ringing voice, "and if you persist, Paul Forsythe, you bid good-by to me forever."

"You don't know how you tempt me, Marian," hissed the Captain. "Go away, unless you would have me forget that you are a woman, and that I have loved you well. Go, and go quickly, while there is yet time."

She wheeled suddenly and came dashing back to the judges' stand.

"Come around me, you who are true men," she cried. "They seek to murder Colonel Steyne."

Steyne laughed, a loud, cheerful, hearty laugh, at which the grounds rung again, and thrusting his hand into his bosom, he drew out a silver-mounted bugle and raised it to his lips. At the call twenty or thirty men, who had been scattered through the crowd about the grounds, came running swiftly toward the stand, drawing their weapons as they ran. Prominent among them could be seen the leonine head and huge gray beard of the "Old Man of the Mountains."

"Hurrah for Colonel Steyne!" was the cry. "To the rescue, boys; women, out of the way!"

"Hold on thar!" cried Old Rube, darting forward in advance of the rest and facing the band of Captain Forsythe. "Our side won't run, but wait until the wimmin kin get out of the way."

Forsythe called his men to a halt. "That is only fair," he said. "We do not war against women, but against Edgar Steyne and his party of Government beagles. We will wait until the women are out of the way."

"You attend to that, Miss Marian," said Edgar. "The women will listen to you and follow you. Let every one who is not going to take sides in this row retreat to the north side of the course, and be quick about it."

A crowd of excited women, children, and old men, were seen hurrying away under the guidance of Marian Lynn, and quickly reached a place of safety under the trees on the north side of the course. It was nothing new nor strange to them to see a pleasant day end in a bloody fight; such scenes are but too common in the section of which we write; and they only thought to get out of range of the firing, although, like Lot's wife, they paused to look back. But Marian urged them on, and a great crowd was soon assembled under the trees, while on the open track the troop of Forsythe, numbering nearly fifty men, were seen rushing upon the smaller body surrounding Colonel Steyne.

And now, to the surprise of the Moonshiners, the marshal's men each drew from a hidden pocket the barrel of a repeating rifle, the stock from another, and a loud snapping sound was heard as the weapons were fitted together; and there they stood, armed with the most efficient weapon ever used at short range, the deadly Winchester!

"Halt there!" cried Edgar Steyne, in a loud, commanding voice. "I do not seek any man's life, and come here for a day of pleasure; but I tell you that if you take another step you will see bloody work."

"The devil!" growled Cal Curtiss. "We can't stand this, Cap; by George, they've repeaters, and we are done for."

"Some spy has betrayed us," hissed the Captain. "But don't let us give up."

"Better leg it, I tell you. What's the use of trying to face those rifles with revolvers and knives?"

"Blame my cats ef they ain't licked already, kernal!" bawled Old Rube. "Creation; see 'em sneak!"

Indeed, the Moonshiners, who had hoped for an easy victory, began to waver as they saw the sort of weapons they were expected to face, and scattered in all directions, leaving their Captain and Curtiss quite alone.

"I might take you now, if I liked, Captain," said Steyne, "but I have other work for you to do yet. Go; I give you your life for the present, but the time will come, and I hope soon, when we shall meet never to part until one of us is under the sod."

"I come here for a fight, my beloved," drawled Old Rube, "and it seems to me that I have fallen into a nest of psalm-singers and saints. I guess I'll make tracks for the mountains, for up there I have a chance for a muss now and then."

"You'll have chances enough before I get done with you, old true blue," said Steyne. "These fellows will give us trouble enough before we end them."

"I live in hope," replied the old man. "But, dern it, who expected to see sech crowsers as them take water so mighty sudden? I never did, for one."

Curtiss and the Captain were walking slowly across the ground, not in a hurry, as their companions had done, but in a quiet way, as if they were not to be frightened by the show of weapons on the part of the backers of Colonel Steyne. As they went they were joined by their companions, who had got to their horses, and two of them, somewhat shame-faced by their desertion of their officers, brought their horses to them, and the two sprang into the saddle.

"Now, you cowards!" cried Forsythe. "Whether I live or die, I am going to charge that gang of United States minions. All who are men follow me!"

And, with a revolver in each hand, he charged straight down the open course toward the party of Edgar Steyne. The movement was well timed, for by the course they had taken they made it impossible for their enemies to use their rifles without some danger to the group of women and children under the trees.

"Follow me!" shouted Steyne, leaping a low fence on the right of the course. "Over here, every man of you."

"Hurrah! they run, they run!" cried the Captain of the ruffian gang.

But he reckoned without his host. No sooner had the Government men crossed the fence

when they turned, and resting the rifles upon the rails, coolly waited for the charge.

The first shot came from the revolver of Captain Forsythe. It glanced from the rail in front of Edgar Steyne and slightly wounded him in the right forearm. Then he raised his rifle and pulled, and the horse of Captain Forsythe, smitten fair in the center of the forehead, came crashing to the earth. Nothing save the splendid horsemanship of Forsythe saved him from being crushed under the falling horse, but he was on his feet in an instant and fired another shot, and a young man in the act of aiming at Cal Curtiss, fell, shot through the brain.

"Shoot to kill!" cried Edgar Steyne. "No mercy for them, now that they have killed Tom Little."

Instantly the rifles began to crack all along the line of the fence. Horses and men went down, rolling over one another before the close and terrible fire. The party of Moonshiners were brave men enough, and most of them had faced death upon blood-stained battle-fields, and in a hundred ways, but never in all their battles had they faced so close and terrible a fire as this. A perfect hail-storm of bullets rained upon them, to which their revolvers could make but a feeble response, and the fence served as a barricade to break the force of their charge. Yet they strove valiantly to urge their horses over the barrier, and it was not until half their number were down, dead or wounded, that they realized how utterly helpless were their efforts.

"We must give it up, Cap," cried Curtiss. "What's the use of throwing away our lives? The men are dropping like mullein leaves."

"Throw up the sponge!" ordered Forsythe, as he received a ball in the shoulder. "I've done what I could."

Curtiss tossed a handkerchief into the air.

"Cease firing!" shouted Edgar Steyne, in a voice of thunder. "They brought it on themselves, but we did not seek their blood."

"But, ain't I happy!" said Old Rube, stopping to wipe the powder from the muzzle of his long rifle. "I ain't had so much fun since Old Rosecrans and Joe Johnson chivied one another along Stone River, and Sherman and my friend Hood banged at one another down there by Atlanta. Oh, ain't it just gellorius! I'm happy as a clam."

"We've got enough, colonel," said Curtiss, gloomily. "Are you fellows going to fire any more?"

"No, unless you attack us again."

"We ain't likely to do that," replied Curtiss. "Jump down, boys, and let's see how many whole bones are left."

The course was strewn with the bodies of horses and men. Ten had been killed outright, and more than half of the others were hurt more or less. Captain Forsythe had been shot through the fleshy part of the shoulder, but he bore his pains calmly. Two wagons were driven up; the dead were laid in them and driven away toward the mountains. Most of them were strangers to the people of Bentleyville, to whom they were only known as men in the employment of Captain Forsythe. When the dead had been sent away other wagons were driven up and filled with straw, and upon these the wounded were laid; and, attended by the horsemen, they rode away in gloomy procession in the direction of the mountain pass.

CHAPTER VII.

AN UNINVITED GUEST.

THE excitement in Bentleyville, after the departure of the Moonshiners, was intense.

It had become a habit with the people to side with these lawless men, but in the present instance they had been too open in their attack upon law-abiding citizens, and had endangered too many innocent lives to allow them to take part with the outlaws. A reaction began to take place, and they realized that there was no safety for any of them if such men were longer supported.

"I tell you what it is, pardners," said Old Rube, addressing a group of citizens upon the fairground after the departure of the Moonshiners. "It ain't the matter of a few gallons more or less bad whisky that makes the difference with me, not by no manner of means. Ne, sirc; 'tain't that. But when I see a gang coming in that ar' way a purpose to kill a man they don't like, fifty to one I side with the weaker vessel. And I say the sooner we clean out Paul Forsythe and his gang the better for every one."

"That's so, Rube," said one of the citizens. "I used to think it was none of Ed Steyne's

Captain Paul, the Kentucky Moonshiner.

business to come here and fool with the Moonshine Men, but when they come to killing and making a shindy when we've got our wives and darters here, it is a little too rough. And we've got to clean 'em out, root and branch."

At this moment a shout was heard and a crowd was seen rushing toward a large tree in the center of the grounds. Upon this tree a placard was stuck up, and upon it, in a bold hand, they read this:

"Whereas: The people of Bentleyville have dared to take sides with the myrmidons of Uncle Sam and to oppose the Moonshine Men; and whereas, in the fight, several Moonshiners have lost their lives: therefore, be it known by these presents that we will burn the town of Bentleyville within ten days, and woe to those who dare oppose us in any way."

THE MINIONS OF THE MOON.

"Now, for pure out-and-out cheek, if that don't bang anything I ever heard of," cried Old Rube. "Well, boys, what do you say? Are you going to wait for them to burn the town? They'll do it, if you give them time."

"See here, Colonel Steyne," said Major Burke, angrily. "How many do you want to clean out this gang?"

"Thirty men, with those I have got, ought to be able to do the business," was the reply.

"You can have a hundred if you want them," said the irate major. "Put me down for one, and if there is a man in the township who won't shoulder his gun in this quarrel, I'm a candidate to carry one end of the rail on which we ride him out of town."

"Oh, we'd better have young men," said Steyne. "It is going to be a fight, I tell you, and there will be wigs on the turf before we get done with it. Pick me out forty young fellows who know how to handle a rifle, and I'll engage to give a good account of these rascals."

A wild enthusiasm seemed to run through the crowd, and the only question was who would not go, not who would.

"Edgar Steyne," cried Marian, pushing her way through the crowd, "you surely are not going to hunt them down like wolves after what you have done already."

"There will be no safety for any one in this town unless they are punished. Look at that infamous placard."

She ran her eyes over it quickly and recognized the handwriting as that of Paul Forsythe.

"Is it possible that they have sunk so low as that?" she murmured. "I never could have believed it."

At this moment a deformed negro boy, who had been working his way through the crowd in a furtive way, sidled up to Marian, and thrust a folded paper into her hand. She drew aside and read it. This was the note:

"Listen to the plots of Ed Steyne and his men and give me warning. Only in this way can you prove that you have not joined our enemies."

PAUL.

She tore it angrily into pieces and beckoned the boy to approach.

"Here, Cudjo," she said, "take these back to your master and say to him that from this hour we are strangers. Let him never come near me, and if he ever dares to speak to me I will lay my whip across his cowardly face."

The boy grinned uneasily.

"You dun s'pose I gwine tell Marse Paul dat, missee? You jess rite down dem words; I neber say 'em."

She took out an old letter and dashed off a few lines hastily and gave it to the boy, who glided rapidly away through the crowd.

"Stop him, thar," cried a hoarse voice. "Stop the humpbacked darky; he's Capt'n Paul's boy, and he's got a message for him."

But the boy had broken through the crowd and was running with wonderful speed, and there was not a man upon the ground who could have overtaken him.

"I'll bring him back," cried Edgar Steyne, bounding into the saddle. "Clear the way, there."

Brown Molly shot away like an arrow, but swift as she went, Marian kept beside her.

"You must not hurt the boy, Edgar," she said. "He only brought a message to me."

"I cannot ask you what the message was, Marian," he said, "and my only way is to bring back the boy."

"The message was an insult, for it made me a spy upon you. My answer was that I would lay my whip across Paul Forsythe's face if he ever dared to speak to me again."

"Was that your answer?"

"Yes."

"Let the boy go, friends," cried Edgar, reining back his horse. "I know the message which he carried and the answer, and he can do us no

harm. Now then, all of you who are to go with me ride home as quickly as you can and get your rifles, and as much ammunition as will serve for a week's campaign. Every one of you must report for duty. Early in the morning, in the village square. Lieutenant Walton?"

One of the men who had fought valiantly by his side that day advanced and saluted.

"You will take the men out as far as the major's plantation and quarter them in the pine grove. I will take charge of the recruits and join you there as early as ten o'clock. Keep the men out of sight, and see to it that there are no stragglers."

The man again saluted and fell back, and the fine body of men who had joined with Edgar Steyne to hunt the Moonshiners down marched away toward the mountains with the lieutenant at their head.

"I'd ask you home with me if I did not know you had work to do, colonel," said the old major. "Of course you will want to see Miss Marian safe home—"

"If she will allow it," said the colonel, bowing. A vivid flush came into the face of the brave girl, and she made no reply, but when she turned her mare toward home the colonel was by her side. They spoke no word for some time, but as they rode on side by side she knew well that she could not have broken the bond which bound her to Paul Forsythe so easily had she never seen the face of the gallant soldier by her side. For over a mile they rode on in silence, and it seemed to her that he could hear the beating of her heart.

"Marian," he said, softly, "while I know that you were bound to another I could not speak in honor, though I knew the man was a villain. But you yourself have broken the tie. I am going into a fight in which I must risk my life, and I should do better service if I knew that you cared for me a little. Do you not, Marian?"

"Edgar," she said, softly. "I was promised to Paul Forsythe long ago. I believed him to be a man of honor until this day—a hunted and persecuted man. I know him now to be what you have called him, and I have torn his image out of my heart. Do your duty like a man, wipe out this plague-spot from our midst, and be sure that the prayers of Marian Lynn will be with you, go where you will."

"I ask no more now," he said. "You have given me hope, and that is enough for me. I love you well and in the time to come I will prove it to you by my deeds."

They rode up to the gate of the old manor house and dismounted. A boy came out to take their horses, for the colonel was in no hurry to ride back as yet, though the shades of evening were falling as they stepped upon the wide veranda. They entered the parlor and sat in the twilight as she sung for him old battle-songs in which his heart delighted, and he listened to the music of her voice. He was in Elysium, and might be pardoned if he forgot all else, even his duty, in the witchery of the hour. She was bending over her harp, touching it with her long white fingers, and he was bending over her, looking into her glorious eyes.

"It seems strange to me that a man whom you have loved could do anything to lose your respect, Marian," he said. "Paul Forsythe could never have loved you, or he would not have done it."

"He did not know my nature or he would not have thought to make a spy of me," she answered. "But for that, nothing could have turned me from him."

"A charming *tete-a-tete*, my brave colonel," cried a harsh voice. "I am sorry to break in upon so pleasant a scene."

Edgar started up quickly and thrust his hand into his bosom in search of a weapon. There was need, for there, in the door of the room, a pistol in his hand, and a scowl dark as night upon his brow, stood the form of the chief of the Moonshiners, Paul Forsythe.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE TABLES TURNED—ON THE ROOF—MARIAN A PRISONER.

"Put down your hand, Colonel Steyne," said the intruder, quietly, "or I shall feel compelled to do something which I would prefer not to do before a lady."

There was no mistaking his meaning, and Edgar Steyne paused, even while his hand was closing upon the hilt of a weapon.

"What do you want here?" he asked, quietly. "Do you not see that you are intruding where your society is not asked for?"

"So it seems, and I am pained that I am obliged to do this, but, really, I have no choice. I understand that it is your intention to root out the Minions of the Moon from the Kentucky mountains?"

"If I live, yes."

"If you live. That is well put, colonel, upon my word. But did it never occur to you that you are not likely to live very long?"

"I am not dead yet, and so much of my life has been passed in deadly peril that I am not as much frightened as I ought to be, perhaps. You may miss me, or you may not kill me outright, and if you don't, I give you my word that I shall not miss you."

"What are you going to do?" cried Marian, suddenly springing between them. "Fire if you dare, Paul Forsythe. Coward that you are, fire at my heart."

"I am tempted to do it," replied the Moonshiner, fiercely. "How dared you send such a message as the one which the boy brought me! In life or death you are mine and I swear to you that I will kill you with my own hand sooner than another shall have you. Were you thinking of the window, colonel; I assure you that it will not be healthy for you to make your escape in that way. Look out, and judge for yourself."

Edgar stepped quickly to the window, and just outside the veranda he saw a number of dark forms, and caught the gleam of steel.

"I was going to say to you that if you attempt to raise the sash the men have orders to kill you. Perhaps it would be better for you if they did, for I do not design to let you die easily."

Edgar suddenly drew his hand from his bosom and showed the small hunting horn, with which he had called his men together that day upon the race-course. Before any one could interfere he sounded those sonorous, peculiar notes, and Paul Forsythe raised his pistol with a savage oath. But before he could fire, Marian was clinging to his arm, and with a loud shout, Edgar hurled himself upon him, and a terrible struggle commenced for the possession of the weapon. But such a struggle could not last long, and the Captain was hurled senseless to the floor, and lay pinioned under the knee of the young marshal, who quickly bound him with his own belt. At the same time Marian sprang to the heavy front door and dropped the bar into its place.

"You can carry him," cried the girl. "Come with me."

Edgar lifted the senseless form of Captain Forsythe from the earth and followed her as she bounded up the wide staircase. She did not pause at the second flight, but continued her upward course until she reached a small step-ladder which led from the attic to the roof. Running up this, she pushed open a scuttle and stepped out upon the roof, which was nearly flat, and surrounded by a parapet four feet in height.

"Let me help you, colonel," she cried, seizing the Captain by the collar. "That is right; push him up. Now we are safe."

She flung back the scuttle and closed it, and they stood together upon the roof. Once safely landed she stepped to the parapet and looked down.

Nearly fifty horsemen surrounded the mansion, seated quietly in their saddles, their rifles resting on their knees, waiting for any attempt at escape on the part of the colonel. Marian broke into a laugh.

"I say, Mr. Calvin Curtiss," she cried, "you come in force to besiege me here, don't you? May I ask what you want?"

"By all the gods, the girl has tricked us," cried Curtiss. "What are you doing up there, Marian Lynn?"

"Oh, we only came up to look at the scenery," was the reply, "and we have prevailed upon Captain Forsythe to come with us. Sound your horn, colonel; call up your men as quickly as you can."

Edgar raised his horn to his lips and sent the long-drawn notes ringing across the plain. Wild cries of rage broke from the lips of the Moonshiners, for they knew that the sound would be heard at the major's plantation, where the men of Ed Steyne were encamped.

"Break in the doors," yelled Curtiss. "We'll have him out of that, and when we do it will go hard with him and that traitress."

"I'd like to mention one thing, Mr. Cal Curtiss," cried Edgar, without showing himself. "The moment I see that we are likely to be captured I shall kill Paul Forsythe. I don't know whether you care anything for the life of your leader, but if you do, I warn you here and

now that it will not benefit his health any if you continue to attack the house."

A sudden silence fell upon the band of outlaws, for they saw that they were in an awkward position.

"We will set fire to the house and burn you out like rats," cried Curtiss.

"Just so; and what will Paul Forsythe be doing in the meantime? Whatever our fate may be, he shall share it," replied Edgar.

"Hold on," said Forsythe, suddenly. "I know when I am beaten, if they don't, and I wish you would raise me up, so that I can talk to them."

Edgar passed his arms about the prisoner, raised him to his feet, and propped him against the wall.

"Are you there, Cal?" he cried.

"Yes, Captain. In the name of all the devils, how did you let them trap you?"

"Never mind that now, as you see I am trapped. I believe that Ed Steyne will keep his word and kill me if he is likely to be taken. That being the case, I am going to make the best terms I can. Ha! look out below! Break my fall."

And to the utter surprise of every one he laid his bound hands upon the edge of the parapet, flung himself over and let himself drop, feet first. It was a fall of at least twenty feet, but the desperate man took the chances sooner than remain longer a prisoner. Half a dozen men rode in swiftly and clutched at the descending form, and actually broke the force of his fall so that he dropped to the earth, a little bruised, but nothing more. A wild yell of delight was heard from the lips of the men, and ready hands relieved him from his bonds.

"Never mind me," he cried. "Down with the door, and take him, dead or alive, I care but little which."

A loud crash was heard as the men attacked the doors and windows with the butts of their rifles. The sashes first gave way, and the tramp of feet could be heard in the lower rooms. Headed by Forsythe, his long hair floating out upon the air, they dashed up the stairs, but when they reached the small step-ladder there was a slight hesitation, for they knew that the first man to push aside the scuttle was a dead man.

"Better give up, you dog," screamed Forsythe, from the foot of the ladder. "There is no mercy for you."

"Then we die here," cried the clear voice of Marian Lynn. "But remember that the passage is narrow, and only one can come up at a time."

"That's so," said Curtiss, laying his hand upon the Captain's shoulder. "I can think of a way to do the work without risking too much. Stay where you are and keep them talking, and leave the rest to me."

He dashed hastily down the stairs, calling two or three of his companions to follow him, which they quickly did.

"Will you give up?" shouted the Captain. "Come, it will be better for all concerned."

"If you want us, you must come and take us," was the reply. "We will die where we stand, but we will not give up. What you do must be done quickly, for help is at hand."

"Girl, you will drive me mad. You have taken sides with my enemies and have leagued with them to betray me. When I take my revenge, and it will surely come, you will know what it is to be false to me—I say, boys, how long does Cal want me to keep up this farce?" he added, aside.

"Let Cal alone, Cap," replied one of the men. "He has a long head."

At this moment a loud shriek was heard on the roof overhead, accompanied by the crack of a pistol, and a scuffle. The sound of feet could be heard pattering on the roof.

"Off with the scuttle," cried Forsythe, "Cal has made his point."

He dashed up the ladder again and was about to hurl the scuttle aside, when it was opened from above, and the dark face of Cal Curtiss appeared. Forsythe sprang through the opening and saw Marian struggling in the grasp of two burly Moonshiners, but Ed Steyne was nowhere in sight. Mad with rage, the Captain rushed at the girl with his hand lifted as if to strike, but Cal Curtiss caught him by the arm.

"No, Captain," he cried. "Never degrade the woman you mean one day to make your wife."

"Then let her speak," he screamed. "Where is Ed Steyne, girl? Tell me instantly, or—"

"You do well to threaten a woman," she replied, proudly. "If you killed or tortured

me you could wring no word from my lips. But if you strike me, and then permit me to live, woe to you in the after days."

The man recoiled before the inspired look upon that beautiful face, and ran to the edge of the parapet, where the men were already running to and fro in search of Colonel Steyne. But no matter how he had effected his escape, he was nowhere to be seen.

"Quick, quick," cried one of the men on the ladder by which they had reached the roof, "I hear horses to the south."

"Bring her on, men," cried the Captain. "Make haste, for we must not fight these dogs here."

Marian was dragged rudely down the stairs and into the open air. A horse had been brought for her use, and she was lifted into the saddle and bound there. Forsythe took the bridle in his hand, and the whole troop dashed away toward the mountain pass. Scarcely had they ridden a mile when a bright light sprang up behind them, and they were quickly joined by two men, who had been left behind for some purpose.

"Done, Captain," said one. "If they put that out they must work lively, I tell you."

"What have you done, Paul Forsythe?" cried the girl.

"Set fire to that nest of treason where you were bred," was the reply. "You have looked your last upon your father's house."

An agonized cry broke from the lips of the girl. She had loved her old home, one of the oldest houses in Kentucky. It had been the pride of the county for many years, and she raised her hand toward heaven.

"I will never forgive you for this," she cried.

He only laughed, a low, bitter, scornful laugh, as they rode into the mountain pass.

CHAPTER IX.

THE MARSHAL ESCAPES—THE VIGILANTES FORWARD—OLD RUBE ON THE TRAIL.

EDGAR STEYNE had not abandoned Marian until satisfied that he could do her better service by escaping than by remaining by her side. At the moment when the mad band were furiously attacking the doors and windows he sprang to the east side of the building, upon which side there was a low shed, ten feet from the ground. "It is base to leave you here alone," he said, hesitating.

"Go, go," she cried. "They will kill you on the spot; but wicked as Paul Forsythe is, he will not harm me. Escape, and then bend your energies to the task of rescuing me from the hands of this villain. Go, while there is time, for I know now that I love you, and if you are killed I will die too."

He turned, caught her to his bosom and imprinted a passionate kiss upon her lips, and sprang over the parapet. He dropped safely upon the roof of the shed, cast a quick glance about him to make sure that he was not observed, and dropped to the ground. A moment later she saw him disappear behind the negro quarters in the rear of the building.

"Thank Heaven," she gasped. "Whatever may happen to me, he is safe."

The moment he was out of sight, Edgar squared his shoulders and began to run toward the major's plantation, five miles away. He was a noble runner, but the distance seemed awful. Why, if his men had heard his bugle, had they not responded? More than half the distance had been traversed when he heard the tramp of coming hoofs, and in a moment more his men appeared, coming on at a mad gallop, while Old Rube, not to be denied, although he had no horse, ran by the side of the troop. The colonel sprang upon one of his men and literally dragged him from the saddle.

"Come on," he screamed. "For God's sake, look yonder."

A bright flame suddenly showed itself in the windows of the old mansion, and they knew that the miscreants had set it on fire. They rode as they had never ridden before, the sparks flashing from beneath their flying hoofs; but rife as they might, the old hunter stuck to them like a burr, and would not be shaken off. And the first man to dash up to the burning house was the Old Man of the Mountains.

"Bring water," he cried, "bring water; we kin save the house yet."

"Let the house burn," cried Edgar, hoarsely; "but save Marian Lynn."

"How do you know the uneasy devils ain't left her on the roof," replied Rube. "She loved the old house; I've heard her say so afore now."

The men set to work with a will, and as the

fire had not made much headway they quickly extinguished the flames, while Edgar ran here and there amid the fire and smoke, eagerly searching for the girl he loved.

"See yer," cried Rube. "Tain't no use to chase them hounds now, because they are in the mountains afore this, an' you know they wouldn't make two bites out'n the twenty men you have here. No sirc; you let me go ahead an' spy out the land, while you go back and rouse all Bentleyville ag'in 'em. They'll come, fast enough, when they know what the cusses hev done. I'll meet yer to-morrer near the quicksand—you know where thet is, kernel—an' probably I'll hev news."

"You are right, Rube," replied the colonel. "There is nothing to be made by haste, for many a head will lie low before we hunt the Moonshine Men out of their mountain haunt. Will you have a horse?"

"Nary boss; what would I do with a hoss, I shed like to know? Kin I snake an' crawl through the mountains a-hossback? Nary time. But I'll do my level best, an' ef I don't save her, at least I can die a-tryin' it."

"Good-by, old man, and God help you!"

The old man darted away at a rapid run, and Edgar, after leaving the troop in charge of his lieutenant, mounted Brown Molly and rode back to Bentleyville at his best speed.

Old Rube ran on, tireless as a wolf, upon the track of the Moonshiners.

There were few places in the Kentucky mountains which he had never seen, few indeed upon which his feet had not rested. There was scarce a quickening of his pulse as he darted along, and the seven miles between him and the mountains were quickly traversed. He drew a long breath as he entered the pass.

"Easy does it now," he muttered. "I've got to be mighty keeful, or I mou't git into trouble. Reckon I'd better make fer home first, an' git Lion. He's a mighty peart kind of a dorg, an' kin run a trail better'n most men."

He passed the cabin of the old negro at a loping trot, when a quavering voice called him:

"Say! who you, dere?"

"Dunno ez thet's any of your biz, Uncle Eph," was the reply.

"Dat you, old Rube?"

"I'm the party."

"Den you'd better huf it rite back whar you come from, 'case I heerd marse Paul say he'd sculp you w'en he ketch you. Dunno mor'n nuffin what fur, but he's awful mad."

"Raally; then you needn't mind tellin' any of 'em you seen me. I'm on my way home now."

He turned aside from the main pass and rapidly ascended the side of the mountain, and Uncle Eph went back into his cabin. Rube hurried on through the darkness until he heard, just in front of him, a low, rumbling growl.

"Thar ye ar', old chap," said the hunter, in a cheery tone. "Come an' see me."

The growl was changed into a muffled bark, but the dog did not advance, and the hunter stepped forward, and by the light of the moon saw the dog lying on the ground, holding some large object before him. Old Rube bent down and inspected the object, and saw that it was a man, in a state of the most abject fear.

"Why, you durned, ornery, no 'count critter, what d'ye mean?" he said, in an angry tone. "Do you pitch into every critter that comes nigh the cabin in that way?"

The dog growled again, and the hunter pushed him roughly aside and caught the man by the collar. Then he saw that it was a rough fellow who bore anything but a good name, and was more than suspected of being in league with the Moonshiners.

"So it's you, is it, my sweet, blooming youth?" growled Old Rube. "Now, lemme ask what the devil you ar' foolin' 'round my cabin fur?"

"Jess come up to see you, Rube; hope I may die ef I didn't."

"What did you want to see me fur, Foxy; spit it out!"

The man hesitated.

"Come, speak up like a man; give it mouth, acuse if I don't get an answer mighty sudden I mou't git mad an' chaw your ear off. Ha! what was ye clawin' all these leaves and papers together for?"

"Nothin', Rube, only to make a fire."

"You waz sent up hyar to burn my cabin, thet's what you was sent fur. You deny it, eh? then I'll hang you up by the thumbs till you holler."

"Hold on," said Foxy, hoarsely. "You ain't goin' to torture me?"

"I reckon I'd better feed you to the dog," said the hunter, in a meditative tone. "He's mighty hungry, he is, an' he'd feed on you, an'

crack your bones, in a way that you'd admire to see. Shall I set him on you?"

"Oh, Rube!" bawled the coward. "Don't do it; don't set the dog on me. He's held me now nigh onto three hours, an' I'm a'most dead."

"Then speak the truth. Who sent you up hyar?"

"Captain Paul."

"I thought so. What hez the bold Captain ag'in' me?"

"Said you took sides with Kernel Ed Steyne to-day."

"Said that, did he, the ornery cuss? So he sent you up hyar to burn me out?"

"Yes."

"An' you found old Lion hyar, an' he objected. Strange, strange, passing strange. Now, Foxy, my darling, my flower, I've got to ask you a question or two an' I want an answer, too. Where do the Moonshine Men hang out?"

"I dunno."

"You don't, hey? Drefful bad kind of memory, you've got, old pard. Lion, my son, taste a small piece of his leg, an' see how you like it."

Lion bounded forward with a howl and made a pass at the leg of Foxy, who gave a howl louder than that of the dog, and danced wildly about.

"Seems to me you'd better answer."

"I don't dare; the Cap'n would have my life."

"Taste of him, Lion," shouted the hunter.

"Go for him, big."

"I'll tell, I'll tell," screamed Foxy. "Call him off."

"Where do they hang out?"

"In Wolf's Glen, cuss you, and let's see you go there, if you dare."

"Do you say that they are in Wolf's Glen?"

"Yes. I do."

"Well, I'm agoin' down to see. I'm goin' alone, an' I'll leave the dog to keep you company. You sot down on that big stun."

The man obeyed, trembling in every limb, and Rube called the dog to him.

"Now, Lion," he said, "I'm going to leave this chap with you, an' remember to keep him hyar. Ef he gets off that stun or speaks above a whisper, chaw off his ears."

The dog actually winked at the speaker. At any rate, it was very plain that he understood and meant to apply what was said to him. The hunter swung the rifle into the hollow of his arm and strode away, and the dog marched up and crouched before the prisoner, ready for a spring if the man moved, which the expression of terror on his face showed that he had no intention of doing.

Rube took his way down the mountain side at a lively pace, for he knew the situation of the glen well, and how to approach it without being seen. His course took him over the plateau where the Moonshine Men had captured Ed Steyne on that eventful morning when he had so nearly suffered death at the hands of Jim Bailey and the Cracker. Once on the other side he worked his way slowly through a narrow ravine and came out upon a ledge from which he could look down into a deep circular valley, which had long borne the name of Wolf's Glen. A deep, dark, desolate place, fringed by dark brown cliffs; a place of horror, in which many a dark deed had been done. Here he paused, and dropping flat upon his face, looked down upon a strange scene.

The glen, usually so silent and deserted, was alive now. More than fifty men could be seen moving here and there, and chatting together in the shadow of the rocks. So close were they that the sound of their voices, as they came floating up, could be distinctly heard. A few men could be seen reclining upon couches of spruce boughs, and these were the men who had been wounded in the encounter with the minions of Uncle Sam on the race course. Oaths came up on the burdened breeze, and the clink of glasses could be heard, as even the wounded men joined in the mad carousal.

"I tell you what it is, boys," cried the harsh voice of Cal Curtiss, as he raised his glass on high, "the time will come when I'll meet that cursed hunter, old Rube, and when I do I'll fill him all full of holes. He's the man who betrayed us."

"Don't you believe it," said the Cracker, who was nursing his shattered wrist. "I tell you that cussid boy was the cause of all, an' if I ever meet him, I'll make it right hot fer him."

"Do you know him, Sol?" said Curtiss.

"Know him; no, never see the young hound afore in all my life, but he had some of our signs down right peart, an' he knew that Captain Paul was king-pin among us. Ha! what's that?"

A stone, loosened from the ledge above, came

rolling down into their midst. To ordinary men this would have been nothing, but to these men, who lived in constant danger, the slightest thing out of the ordinary line speaks of danger, and instantly half a dozen armed men were on their feet, looking wildly at the cliff from which the stone had come.

CHAPTER X.

THE BOY SPY—IN THE CAVE—OLD RUBE NEAR DEATH.

"WHAT'S the row?" cried a clear, commanding voice, and Captain Paul suddenly appeared in sight.

"Dunno, Captain," replied one of the men, "only a stone come rolling down the hill, an' we didn't know whar it come from."

"Two or three of you take your rifles and jump up there. If you find any cursed spy, you know what to do."

There was a world of threatening in the tone of the speaker and the men who leaped up the rocks did so with anything except pacific intentions. But when they reached the ledge from which the stone had come they found it vacant, for Old Rube was not the man to remain where his company was not desired, and he had prudently drawn back out of sight in the shelter of the ravine. The men searched carefully and even came half-way up the ravine, but the place was dark as Erebus and they could see nothing. A moment later they went back, and Rube drew a long breath.

"Pears like I dunno what to do with myself," he muttered. "Them skunks are really pizen; they meant biz, if they had hopped onto me."

And he crawled quietly back to the place he had occupied but a moment before. As he did so he was conscious that another figure occupied the ledge, a slight, boyish form, as revealed in the clear moonlight, the form of the lad who had rescued Ed Steyne from the quicksand. The old hunter gave a low, hissing signal, and the boy rose on one knee with a pistol in his hand.

"Down, ye imp!" hissed Old Rube. "Don't you see who I be?"

The boy sunk down again, and fixed his eyes upon the camp, and the hunter crawled to a place close beside him.

"Is that all the gang?" he whispered.

The boy shook his head, and continued to gaze into the camp below. As they lay there, watching, they heard a sound which took them utterly by surprise, the sound of feet coming down the ravine through which they had reached the ledge. Old Rube realized in an instant that they were in a trap.

"Kiver, boy, kiver!" he hissed. "Crawl close to the rocks an' scooch down. Ez fur me, I'm goin' to make a break."

He bounded to his feet, and just as he did so half a dozen figures came out upon the ledge. A glimpse at their faces was enough to show who they were, even though one of them did not bear upon his shoulder a keg of the famous mountain dew, for the manufacture of which the Moonshine Men are hunted up and down the mountain passes. Old Rube did not pause for question, but with a yell like a demon he broke through them and bounded into the ravine. But, quick as he was, the boy was by his side, and they were half-way down the pass before the startled Moonshiners realized that anything had happened. Then, with wild yells of rage, they drew their weapons and darted after.

Fleet-footed as Old Rube was, he realized that he had met his match for once. The boy kept by his side with ease, and by the time the Moonshiners had come out of the pass they had crossed the plateau and were hidden in the thick scrub upon the other side.

"Easy, boy, easy," whispered the old hunter. "Let 'em canter by; we'll take a rest."

They lay silent in the shelter of the bushes, and soon the Moonshine Men raced by, yelling madly, and taking the direction of the old hunter's cabin.

They had scarcely passed when Old Rube rose, and catching the boy by the hand, turned to the right, and threading his way through the scrub with the ease of a hound upon the trail, kept on for nearly half a mile; and then, reaching a rocky ledge, he paused before a dark opening in the rocks, which looked like the mouth of a cave.

"Come in hyar," he said. "I'll bet a farm in the Blue Grass that they won't tackle me in this place."

The opening was just large enough to permit the passage of the body of a man, and the guide stepped in boldly, still holding the hand of the brave lad. They were now in a dark, narrow passage, the sides of which could be touched

with the extended hands, but which was higher than a man's head. As they proceeded the passage became lower, and soon they were obliged to stoop as their heads touched the roof overhead. At last they were forced to crawl, and passed through an opening barely two feet square.

"Now you've got elbow room, my lad," said the guide, speaking in his natural voice. "Stand still where you are an' I'll give you a light."

He stepped away and could be heard groping upon the other side of the apartment, whatever it was. A moment later a match was struck, and the sputter of a pine-knot was heard. In a moment more it sprang into a brilliant flame, and lighted up the vast room in which they stood.

It was a wonderful place; one of the freaks of nature in the mountains. A room so vast that it cast into the shade the wonders of Mammoth Cave. The roof was so high that the light of the single blazing knot could not reach it, but it revealed beauties enough. On each side were regular columns, formed by the wondrous limestone droppings, which sparkled in the light as if set with diamonds. In the center of the room, upon the smooth white floor, stood something which looked like a gigantic throne, and upon it was seated a giant form, as perfect as if the hand of the sculptor had carved it. The boy stood with clasped hands, awe-struck and wrapt in admiration by the beauty of the scene.

"Never see anything just like it, did you, my boy? I reckon you an' I ar' the only ones that ever set foot on these stones. It's worth a year out of a man's life to see it."

"It is beautiful," the lad said, in an awe-struck voice. "It seems like a desecration for us to be here."

"I don't look at it that way," replied the hunter, dryly. "It seems to me, rather, thet it would be a place where we could stand out against an army. Why, they'd hev to come one at a time, an' we could stand thar an' bu'st 'em jest ez fast ez they poked the'r noses into the room. But that ain't nyther here nor there. Would you be afraid to stay hyar while I go out on a scent?"

"Not at all. But why should I not go with you?"

"I'd ruther go alone," he answered. "I'm jubious they'll make some mischief up to my cabin, an' ef they hurt my dog ther ain't men enough in the hull gang to pay fur it."

"Go, then," said the boy. "I will stay here."

The scout glided away as rapidly as he could, and the boy was left alone in the vast room. The moment he was satisfied that he was alone he sprang up and rapidly crossed the room to the place where the old hunter had found the pine-knot. He was pleased to find a number of them lying on a shelf, and he quickly lighted one by the flame of the other.

"I believe that this place will lead me to the cave I seek," he mentioned. "Whether I live or die, I will explore it."

He crossed the room at a rapid pace, searching for an opening. For some time he had no success, but at last, rounding a great column, he came to a natural passage, nearly twenty feet in height and twelve feet wide. Down this passage he trod slowly, holding a pistol in one hand ready for use, and treading softly, as if at each moment expecting to face sudden danger. The passage led him into another room not quite so large as the first, but more beautiful. In the very center bubbled up a beautiful spring of clear limestone water, and here the boy paused for a moment, for from this room there branched out three passages.

He hesitated which to take, and at last turned into the right-hand one, and followed it for half an hour. All at once he heard, in some passage before him, the tread of many feet, and a Babel of voices, and a light flashed before his eyes; and he knew that some party, who it was he did not know and could not guess, was passing through some portion of the subterranean place not far away. Quick as thought he set his foot upon the torch which he carried, and advanced with a hurried but silent step, until he saw before him a great passage, far wider than the one through which he walked, which was now bathed in the light of several torches.

"Come on, come on," roared a savage voice. "Dot rot him, bring the cuss along. We'll see whether he kin play it on the Moonshine Men in their own den, the dod blasted thing."

"Kinder easy, pard," said a voice, which the boy recognized as that of Old Rube. "Don't be too hard on a fellow what you knows ez well ez you knows me. Take me up tenderly, lay me down softly; in other words, let up."

"That's enuff, you old villain," cried the voice of Paul Forsythe. "You know well enough that we have you to thank for this escape."

"Who's escape? Didn't you jump onto me when I was goin' to my peaceful home?"

"Where you had Foxy sitting on a rock, with your cursed dog watching him! Oh, yes; you are an innocent duck—we all know that."

As he spoke they passed the opening to the passage in which the boy was lying on his face, watching with deadly earnestness the march of the party. He saw Paul Forsythe at the head, holding a flaming torch, and then a motley group of Moonshiners, several of them bearing torches, and driving in their midst, urging him on with repeated blows from sticks and bowie-knives, the irrepressible hunter, Old Rube.

"The durned ornery skunk was tryin' to set fire to my cabin," cried Rube. "You'd do the same thet I did ef you found him foolin' round thar. I didn't hurt the skunk, did I?"

"All the better for you," replied Paul. "But perhaps you would like to explain what you were doing up on the ledge, where you were watching our camp to-night."

"I'm a leetle inclined to be inquisitive, I allow," replied the hunter. "I wanted to see where the Moonshine Men hung out an' try to find out whar Miss Marian Lynn was. We knowed you took her away."

"Do you know whar she is now?"

The hunter shook his head.

"I believe you lie," was the impolite response; "but there is one thing you do know, and I'm going to have that out of you or kill you. Where is the boy who was with you on the ledge?"

"Dunno what you mean. What boy? Thar waan't no boy up thar with me. Foxy kin tell you thet I was all alone when I caught him up on the mountain."

"That's so, Cap," replied Foxy. "He didn't hev nobody with him then."

"Be silent, Foxy. The fellow cannot deceive me, for the boy broke through our men close by his side, and they ran down the ravine together. Once for all, where is he?"

"You'll hev to find out by your l'arnin'," replied the old hunter. "Let's s'pose the boy was with me, you don't know the old man ef you think he'd betray a friend. You might cut me into inch pieces, and I would not tell."

Captain Paul whirled in his tracks, drawing a pistol as he did so. The ominous click of the lock was heard, and the cold muzzle of the pistol was pressed against the forehead of the brave old man.

"Once for all—and I shall not ask you twice," hissed Captain Paul; "where is that boy? Speak, or I shoot."

"Shoot, then," was the reply. "I kin die like a man."

CHAPTER XI.

CATCHING A TARTAR—VIGILANTES AND MOONSHINERS.

THE night had been a busy one for the people of Bentleyville. At the call of Ed Steyne the young men had bravely responded, and before twelve o'clock, with ninety horsemen at his back, the gallant marshal rode away from the village, taking the trail for the mountain pass. At three o'clock, after joining forces with the men who were in advance, they reached the quicksand, where the colonel had so nearly ended his life.

"Picket your horses here, men," said Edgar, quickly. "I will wait until morning for the coming of Old Rube."

"Unless he gets into a scrape, colonel," said Major Burke. "He might do that."

"He is a cool old scout," was the reply, "and I am quite sure that he will not allow himself to be trapped."

As he spoke a huge body came crashing through the mountain, and a large animal bounded into view. Several of the men handled their rifles, but at a word from Major Burke they paused. "No shooting, boys," he cried. "I know that dog, and he belongs to Old Rube."

The animal seemed to be searching for some one he knew, and ran along the line until he caught sight of the major. Then he sprang up, placed his forepaws on the saddle, and looked at the old soldier in a strange, hesitating way.

"What is it, Lion, old boy?" said the major. "Where is Old Rube?"

The dog uttered a long, low howl.

"Has he got into trouble?"

By way of answer, the dog caught hold of the skirt of the major's coat and pulled.

"That means he wants you to follow him," said one of the men.

"Give me half a dozen men, colonel," said the major. "I'll go up to the old man's cabin—it isn't half a mile from here—and see what is up."

"Pick out your men," was the brief reply. The major selected the men he needed by name, taking care to pick out one good scout, whom he directed to follow the dog, while the rest brought up the rear. They rapidly ascended the mountain side, and quickly reached the cabin of the old hunter. The scout advanced and took a searching survey of the ground. It did not take him long to decide.

"There has been a scuffle here, major," he said. "Half a dozen men have jumped onto Old Rube and taken him. If you care to follow him, the dog will lead the way."

"I don't like to do that until I have talked with the colonel," said the major. "Besides, we hav'n't got men enough to tackle them, even if the dog should lead us right. No doubt he would take us into the very thick of the outlaw camp."

"Very likely; then we'd better go back and report."

He had turned to take the back trail when the bushes became suddenly alive with armed men. They sprang up on every hand, rifles gleamed, and the click of pistol locks broke upon the silence of the night.

"Sorry to trouble you," said a low, mocking voice, "but I'll have to ask you to walk into my parlor, as the festive spider remarked to the sportive fly. Take care, major; there are at least three rifles bearing on every one of you, and—"

"Charge!" cried the brave old major, as he fired a pistol straight in the direction of the mocking voice. "Break through them, lads."

With a stunning cheer the brave fellows dashed straight down the mountain side, closely followed by a crashing volley. Three of them fell, two never to rise again, while the long-drawn blast of a bugle, rolling up from the pass below, told that the shots had been heard by their friends, and that they would not be long without aid. The outlaws came pouring out upon the trail of the flying men, firing as they ran. Another man sunk down, and at last the old major received a ball in the thigh, and fell.

"Shoot that cursed dog!" cried Cal Curtiss, who commanded the Moonshiners. "He'll be following our trail next."

But the dog seemed to scent danger, and bounding over the prostrate body of the old major, he sprang down the side of the mountain, out of sight and hearing. At the same time there came up from below the sound of rushing feet, and Curtiss knew that the vigilantes were coming to the aid of their friends. His whistle, calling in his men, rung out sharp and clear.

"This is not the place to meet them," he cried. "Come with me."

He plunged into one of the many passes by which the mountain was serried, and was quickly followed by his men, and the field was left to those who had fallen. Five minutes later up came Ed Steyne at the head of fifty of his men. He found the major seated against a rock tearing at portions of his clothing to stop the flow of blood.

"We found them, colonel," he said, coolly, "and are very much in the position of the man who caught the Tartar. Where is the dog?"

"No matter about him. How many of the Moonshiners did you see?"

"I didn't stop to count them," was the reply. "Might have been twenty or thirty. I reckon they've put back now."

"We will not be long behind them, my brave old man," said Edgar. "But first, let me look at your wound."

He tore away the cloth and found that a bullet had plowed its way through the fleshy part of the thigh. He quickly washed and dressed it as well as he was able, and called four men to take the major up and carry him into Old Rube's cabin, where he was laid upon a couch of deerskins. Two of the men were found to be dead, and among them the scout who had been selected by the major. Another was wounded, and he was brought in and laid beside the major.

"Now for vengeance," cried Edgar, sternly. "Call the dog."

Lion came forward at the call, and quickly took up the trail. The brave animal seemed to know what was required of him and at once advanced at a slow trot, followed by the Vigilantes, with their weapons at a trail, ready for

instant work. There were few among them who had not seen service, upon one side or the other, in the course of the "late unpleasantness." Nine out of ten were old soldiers who were delighted at the opportunity to fight a battle for the right. There was no flinching as they came on at a quick-step, following the bounding figure of the dog, until he suddenly paused in front of the entrance to a narrow pass and crouched to the earth.

"Drop!" hissed Ed Steyne.

The Vigilantes fell as if each had received a ball in the heart, and not a moment too soon, for the mouth of the pass was suddenly lighted up, and a volley of rifle-balls went singing harmlessly over their heads.

Zip, zip, zip!

The familiar battle sound stirred the blood of these men as when in the old days they had heard the bullets of the foemen flying about their ears, in the days when those giants Sherman, Rosecrans, McPherson, Johnson, Hood, Longstreet, and soldiers of that ilk, struggled for the mastery through the mountains and valleys of Kentucky and Tennessee.

"Up and at them!" cried Ed Steyne. "Charge before they load."

He was not the man to say "go," but bounded forward in advance, a revolver in each hand, his eyes flashing with the ardor of battle. Brave as the Moonshiners were, and they were brave to a fault, they could not stand that charge. Some three or four who stood up manfully were hurled to the earth, trampled under foot, and over them charged the brave Vigilantes, pouring in a volley as they ran. But, as the pass widened, to their utter surprise, the enemy had disappeared as utterly as if they had sunk into the earth.

"By George!" cried Edgar, looking wildly about him. "Where the devil have they vanished to?"

A burst of mocking laughter which seemed to come from the rocks which lined the pass, was the only answer, and Ed whistled for the dog. He came bounding forward, and to their surprise sprang straight at the rugged wall on the right, and seemed to strive to tear it down with his teeth.

"There is a cave here somewhere," said Edgar, approaching the place where the dog was tearing at the tangled vines. As he bent to look a bullet grazed his skull, and he sprang back.

"Come down," cried the mocking voice of Cal Curtiss. "We are here to welcome you, and by heaven we will make it warm for you."

"Come out and face us, cowards," replied Edgar. "Sneaks that you are, meet us like men."

"Come in range again and I will aim better next time," said Curtiss. "Here we stand, waiting for you to descend."

By this time they could make out the entrance to the cave. It was a sort of inclined plane, which led into utter darkness, and the bottom of which could not be seen.

Edgar knew well that at the bottom, crouching like tigers and knowing every inch of the dark and dismal place, their enemies waited for them. It would not do, and no one knew it better than himself.

How to get at them—that was the question. He had been too long a soldier to think of throwing away the lives of his brave men in attacking the place as it stood, and he signaled them to stand back and hold their weapons ready.

"There must be some way out of this," he murmured. "If I could only think it out."

"Let us get at them, colonel," said one of the men, respectfully. "Some of the boys will go under, of course, but we'll stand the racket. What do you say?"

"It would be throwing away lives to no purpose. They could kill us as fast as we came down."

"I'll drive them back a little if you say so, colonel," said the man. "I was in the Sharpshooters, you see, and I can pick out five men as good as I am. Let us get up where we can get a sight into that hole, and we'll make them stand back."

"Do it," said the colonel, briefly.

The man called out five of his companions by name, and they quickly ran out of the pass and gained a position upon the other side, from which they could look down into the cave. At the foot of the inclined plane they knew well that their enemies stood, and at the right moment their friends below lighted torches, and crawling close to the entrance, without showing themselves, held them up so that the light fell into the pass. It revealed twenty men, their rifles grasped ready for action, and their knives

and pistols where they could reach them at a moment's notice, waiting for them to descend. The inclined plane was just rough enough to permit a man to run down rapidly without danger, at an angle of perhaps forty degrees.

Five rifles were raised, each covering its man. Five reports blended into one, and five Moonshiners fell dead in their tracks. No need to load again, for these men carried the deadly repeater. Before the Moonshine Men had fairly realized their danger, another volley sounded, and three more fell. Then, in the confusion, the Vigilantes charged down the inclined plane upon their startled foes.

CHAPTER XII.

THE BOY CAPTURED—DEATH OF CURTISS—THE ROLLING STONE.

We left Old Rube standing in the midst of his enemies, bold, defiant, even with the pistol at his head. That cold iron circlet pressed against his forehead would have awed most men, but there was not a single start or shiver in his mighty frame as the chill of the iron passed through his blood. He only looked Paul Forsythe firmly in the eye, and his firm black orbs did not change.

"I count three to give you a chance for your life," cried Paul Forsythe, "and then if you do not speak, down you go. One."

The old hunter only smiled.

"Two!"

The finger began to quiver on the trigger, when a clear, boyish voice cried:

"Here I am!"

"Dernation!" yelled Old Rube. "You durned ornery, no 'count little critter, what made you blow your horn?"

All turned, with a start of surprise, and saw the boy standing in the opening of the narrow passage, his arms folded upon his breast, and a proud smile upon his thin lips. The next moment he vanished like a spirit, and with a wild cry Paul Forsythe dropped his pistol and darted after.

"Come on!" he cried. "A hundred dollars to the man who takes him, but the one who does him harm I will kill like a dog."

The sound of the boy's feet had ceased, for he was shod with moccasins, and these made but little noise. They darted into the passage in close pursuit, waving their torches in the air, and shouting at the tops of their voices. Close by the side of the captain ran Sol Tibbitts, his arm still in a sling, and his sallow face blazing with fury.

"What d'ye want to take him alive for?" he gasped. "I've sworn to hev his life."

"If you hurt him so much as the scratch of a pin, you dog, I will kill you without mercy. Understand that."

"And who's to revenge Jim Bailey, then?"

"Old Rube killed Jim Bailey, not this boy. Be that as it may, no harm must come to the boy. I want him taken alive and unhurt."

The two darted on side by side, now running through narrow passages, now through great arched rooms, and again creeping through places where there was partly room for the body of a man to pass. At last they came to the place where the passages branched out from a single room, and here they paused, bewildered.

Which one had the boy taken? They no longer had his footsteps to guide them, and it was impossible to say which one he had taken:

"Divide!" cried Paul Forsythe, as the men came up. "A party into each of these four passages. I take the one to the right. Ralph Stanley, Ned Boyd, and Elegant Pete, follow me."

He darted into the passage which the boy had actually taken in his flight, for in the confusion the lad had become somewhat bewildered, and had taken the wrong turn; and he had not gone far when in the darkness of the place he became satisfied that he was wrong. He was just about to turn back when he saw, far ahead, a flood of brilliant light, and heard the sound of a terrible fusillade. It was the attack of the sharpshooters upon the men of Cal Curtiss.

He darted forward eagerly, when there came racing down the passage a dozen men or more, some of them bleeding from two or three wounds. At their head, mad with rage, ran Cal Curtiss, his black hair floating back upon the breeze, and his eyes flashing fire. The lad crowded close against the wall, hoping in that manner to escape them, but the keen eyes of Curtiss caught sight of the crouching figure, and his fierce grasp was instantly fastened upon the boy.

"Come up here, you young hound," he cried. "I want to see your face. Hold the torch down, Handsome John."

The fellow addressed, as ugly a man as could

be found south of the Ohio, obeyed the orders, and the light fell full upon the face of the lad. Curtiss gave a long whistle of astonishment.

"Well, this is rich," he cried. "I am happy to meet you; upon my word I am. You will serve as a safeguard against these cursed Vigilantes."

He caught the boy by the wrist in a firm grasp, when the charging cheer of the Vigilantes was heard not far away.

"Take care of the boy, Handsome," said Curtiss, "and keep on your way. I know a way to stop them."

The Moonshiners darted on, dragging the prisoner in their midst, while Curtiss turned back alone to meet the Vigilantes. As they came rushing down the passage they found their way barred by this single man, holding up his blazing torch.

"Stop a little, colonel," he said, holding up his left hand. "Where are you going?"

"Down with him," cried Edgar. "Do not let him bar the way."

"You'd better hear what I've got to say first, colonel," said Curtiss, with an evil smile. "I know a person you think a good deal of, who is in danger unless you stop where you are."

"What do you mean?"

"Come up here where I can speak to you, and you shall know. Keep your men back; you ought not to be afraid to speak to me alone."

Signing to his men to stand fast, the colonel stepped forward quickly, and reached the side of the outlaw.

"Do you remember the boy who saved you from the quicksand the other night, my dear colonel?"

"I do; what of him?"

"Nothing more than this: I have just captured the young hound. Do you happen to know who he is?"

"I never met him before, and he disappeared the moment he had seen me safe on the road to Bentleyville."

"Bend closer, colonel. That boy who saved your life, is—"

He whispered a name in the ear of Edgar Steyne. He gave a great start, and looked at the fellow with wildly dilated eyes.

"It is false."

"Well, have it so, if you will. I have left him in the hands of all the men your sharpshooters have left me, and they don't know who he is. I gave them orders to kill him if you did not at once give up the pursuit."

"You hound."

"Just so, colonel. All is fair in war, they tell me, and you have hunted us until we are desperate. I give you fair warning that his life is not safe if you do not give up the pursuit."

"You dare not do it. Such a brutal deed as that would give you all the rope instead of the prison."

"You may try the experiment if you like, colonel, but don't say I didn't give you fair warning. Perhaps it would be as good a way of avenging our slaughtered brothers as any other, curse you."

"Wait a moment, while I speak to the men. Let us hear what they say about it, for I am in their hands, since some of them have fallen."

"I will not wait," cried Cal, dashing his torch into the face of the colonel. "Take that, curse you."

As the colonel reeled back before the blow a single rifle cracked and Curtiss spun half round on his heel, with a wild malediction, and fell dead in his tracks. The men came dashing out, but the colonel stopped them, extending his hands.

"Out of the way, if you won't lead us, colonel," cried one of the men. "I've fixed Cal Curtiss, and that's good enough for me."

At this moment a volley from a dozen rifles cut its way through the narrow passage and two of the Vigilantes dropped dead, and one of them was the speaker. His voice was hushed forever in death.

"Follow, men," hissed Ed Steyne. "Whoever lives or dies, there must be no faltering now."

They dashed forward again, the brave young marshal at their head. Before they had taken a dozen steps a second volley met them and they could only tell by the flash of the rifles where the enemy lay. The last volley was followed by the rush of feet, which rapidly died away in the distance, and the Vigilantes darted away in pursuit. The race continued through the long passages, until again the lights of the retreating Moonshiners showed in front, and they knew that they were gaining.

"Forward, boys, forward," cried the colonel. "Get the wolves once within arm's length and if they escape us a ain it will not be our fault. Hasten, in God's name, for there is need."

The men responded by stunning cheers, and renewed their efforts, closing rapidly upon the flying enemy. Then they turned again, but this time it was the Vigilantes who fired, in spite of the efforts of Edgar to stop them.

"Take care, boys, take care!" he cried. "They have prisoners among them, and you may kill them."

"Yaas, an' dern my hide ef I don't make grass soup of the man who fires another shot. Come on, boys; give 'em the cold steel."

It was the voice of Old Rube, who in the confusion of the chase after the boy had managed to make his escape. The Moonshiners fired an answering volley, and three men went down.

"Thar's a rifle fur me," cried Old Rube, taking the weapon from the weak hand of a wounded man. "Give it up, dern ye, it's no use to you."

They stood upon a sort of slope which seemed to lead up to the very roof of the cavern. On the crest they could see the forms of the Moonshiners dimly outlined, and they seemed to be rushing about a globe-shaped stone at the summit.

"Take care," cried a clear voice above them.

"Out of the way for your lives."

"Silence, there," hissed the voice of Paul Forsythe, "or by Heaven! I will strike you in the face. Work, boys, work."

"What are they doing there?" cried Edgar.

He had scarcely spoken when the round globe above them was seen to be in motion, and it began to roll slowly down the slope. Then, too late, the men who had rushed forward saw the awful peril of their situation. That great globe of limestone which was coming down, gathering impetus as it came, nearly closed the passage upon each side. Wild cries of terror broke from the lips of the startled Vigilantes at the awful peril in which they were placed. One or two, completely unmanned, fell upon their faces in the track of the coming ruin. As it rolled it gathered way, and a dull hum was heard as it came flying down the steep descent, amid a cloud of smoke and circle of bright sparks.

It was death, dreadful death to the Vigilantes, to whom no avenue of escape seemed open, and a burst of triumphant laughter was heard in the pass as the stone came crashing down, mingled with the wild scream, the voice of a woman in agony!

And, there they stood, looking helplessly to the right and left, while that giant boulder, freighted with human lives, and gathering more and more speed as it rolled, came crashing down upon them!

CHAPTER XIII.

THE DOG SCOUT—THE MOONSHINERS' DEN—PAUL FORSYTHE CLAIMS HIS BRIDE.

"CLOSE to the wall, men," cried Ed, flattening himself against the wall of the cavern. "It may pass us yet."

The men saw that this was their only chance and followed his example, while not a few ran for their lives. All at once they heard a resounding crash, and there was the great stone wedged into the narrow space upon each side, fixed as the mountain rocks which pressed it in on either side.

"That shuts the door," cried the voice of Paul Forsythe. "You may thank your lucky stars that the passage is so narrow. Good-by, boys; see you again, one of these days."

"Kernel," said Old Rube, drawing a long breath, "the eternal skunk has fixed us mighty peart. I judge there ain't no way out'n this; leastways, not easy."

"There is a way, there must be a way, or they would not take it so coolly. Did you hear that scream as the rock came down?"

"A female critter. Yaas, I heard it, kernel, and I'll own it puzzles me what a woman kin be doing with this wild-cat gang, unless—but it ain't no use to blow. Let's try the cussed stone an' see if we can't start it out."

"No use of that. If we loosened it, it would come down upon us. Ha; there is your dog again, Rube."

"Hullo, old chap," said Rube. "Kin you figger out a way to git at them critters? I want to git that boy away from 'em awful bad. Here's a han'kercher he dropped; think of any critter usin' a han'kercher in these yer hard times. Smell to that, Lion; kin ye find out?"

The dog sniffed at the handkerchief for a moment, and then gave utterance to a long low howl, and turned back down the passage which they had just left.

"That won't do, Rube," said the colonel. "He is following the back track, don't you see. It is not of any use."

"Lion knows what I want, an' he don't take no back track, do ye, old boy? You'd better trust him, kernel."

"I don't know but that the best way will be to go back and get the rest of the men. It will be safer on all sides."

"We've got men enough, I reckon. See thar; the dog is looking back and calling on us to up an' foller. We'd better take his word, for the old feller ain't nobody's fool."

"I will trust him this time," cried Edgar. "Now, boys; come on."

The dog led the way down the passage which they had followed for some distance, and then made a sharp turn to the right and entered a passage which they could scarcely see, as it was hidden by a great stalactite which hung from the roof. The passage was just wide enough for one person to pass through without stooping, and the light of the torches flashed back from a hundred thousand points as they proceeded. A dead silence, a silence which could almost be felt, reigned around. Their footsteps alone could be heard, muffled as they were, with here and there the rattle of a buckle or the click of a lock.

"I wonder where he is taking us," said Edgar. "I have heard of such a thing as people being lost in these dismal dens, and wandering about until death claimed them."

"Not if they take the pains to leave a mark behind that I do," replied Rube. "I haven't made a turn that I didn't leave the mark of this bloody paw of mine on the wall. I'll engage to take ye back safe. What's that, Lion?"

The dog uttered a low whine. "Back there, you with the torches," hissed Edgar. "By the gods of war, I see a light yonder!"

The light seemed to come from a hole in the floor of the passage, just in front. A sort of vapor arose, mingling with the light, and settling on the walls in humid exhalations. Dropping upon his knee, Edgar approached the strange chimney and looked down.

"The sight which he saw was a strange one, only possible in a place where the Moonshine Men held sway.

It was a great distillery, nothing more or less, the source of that stream of illicit liquor which had flowed from the Kentucky mountains for many a day. Great mash tubs surrounded the sides of a vast cave, from which the sickish odor of fermented corn arose. A number of men—at least twenty in all—stripped to the waist, were working in the fetid atmosphere of the cave. On the south side, under a natural archway, great heaps of barrels showed that the Moonshiners had not worked in vain, and Edgar could hardly restrain a shout of delight; and, putting out his hand, he patted Lion softly on the neck.

"Good boy," he whispered. "Brave old dog. You have done a good work this night; I'll say that."

"The boys must be having a lively fandango with the U. S. men," said one of the distillers, as he lifted the end of a worm and threw it aside. Its mighty rough on us, because we know how to work the creature, to leave us here when all the fun is going on."

"The Cap will have his way," said another. "I know better than to buck against him. But how mad he was when that girl slipped away from us last night. And how that blamed mare did go! Never saw anything like it in all my life."

"How did she manage it?"

"Blamed if I know. The first I see she went sailing over the bushes like a bird, and then you might as well have chased the wind as that mare. We've done Ed Steyne, though; he never can find us here."

"I don't know. He is such a sharp chap, it is mighty hard to tell where he will wind up. Sometimes I think he's bound to beat us yet."

"He'll do it, too, if there is such a thing on the books," said another man, as he turned a faucet in one of the tubs to allow the liquor to run off. "And when he once gets on our track, good by to moonshining in these mountains. If it wasn't for the caves we wouldn't have the ghost of a chance. Ha! what's that noise?"

The men ran to their arms, which were piled in the corner, but before they could lift them the peculiar signal whistle of the Moonshiners reassured them, and soon after all that were left of the gang, some sixty in all, came trooping in, Paul Forsythe clutching by the wrist the youngster whom they had captured.

"Oh, you won't get away, mind you," he cried, angrily. "It was quite as much as I

could do to keep the boys from handling you roughly. Do you know that Sol Tibbitts accuses you of shooting him the other day, and that you were the cause of the escape of Ed Steyne?"

"I rather think friend Tibbitts is right on that point," said the young fellow, with a light laugh. "Let go my wrist; I am not going to try to escape now."

"Do you give me your word of honor that you won't try to escape?"

"Not to-night, unless my friends should come to my aid, and then, of course, I shall not object to being set at liberty. On those terms I give my parole for the present, and promise to give you fair warning when I don't intend to be found any longer. What do you say to that?"

Paul Forsythe, with a lowering look, released his hold upon the hand of his captive, and the boy quietly sat down upon one of the upturned tubs, clasping his knees with both hands, and watching the motions of the party with a strange, intent gaze. Low murmurs were heard among the men, and they grouped together in little knots, regarding the boy angrily. At last Sol Tibbitts detached himself from one of the groups and stepped forward:

"I say, Cap'n," he said. "When I jined this gang I believe I took an oath, didn't I?"

Paul Forsythe started, and laid his hand upon a weapon.

"Now, Cap'n, none of that," said the man, quietly. "You orter know that there is only one fair thing in this business, an' that you tuk an oath the same as the least of us. Mebbe you kin remember what that oath was."

"If I did not you are not the man I would take lessons from, Sol Tibbitts," replied the Captain, in an angry tone. "Go about your business, and leave me to attend to mine."

"I ain't speakin' for myself," said the Cracker, quietly. "I'm speakin' fur all the boys when I say that the boy hez got to be judged by our laws, and ef he is guilty he's got to die."

"My worthy corn-cracking friend," said the Captain, in a mocking tone, "I have known you a long time, but I never knew before that you set so little value upon those precious brains of yours. Now, once for all, if you do not go about your business I will shoot you where you stand."

A dozen revolvers instantly glittered in the light of the swinging lamps, and at a glance the Captain saw that the Cracker had not spoken unadvisedly.

"Hold on, boys," said Paul, dropping his hand from the revolver which he held. "After all you are in the right and I in the wrong; but the explanation of my course is so simple that with a word I can satisfy you all. Come here, Sol."

The Cracker approached slowly, his hand upon a weapon, ready to draw upon the slightest provocation. But the Captain bent and whispered a sentence in his ear, which caused him to start and cast a quick glance in the direction of the prisoner. The next moment he burst into a light laugh.

"I'm satisfied, Cap'n," he said. "'Pon my soul, I never thought of that, derved ef I did. And so that's the racket, eh? Well, well, well! I'll speak to the boys and make it all right with them."

He passed about among the men, and, as he whispered to them, many quick glances were cast in the direction of the prisoner, who still sat quietly regarding them, and evidently caring but little what they did.

But I'd like to say one thing, Cap," said one of the men. "It isn't right that a stranger, who is not bound to us in any way, should know so much about us. Don't it strike you in that way?"

"You are right in every way, Tom," said the captain, "and for that reason I propose, as soon as Squire Thompson comes in, that a tie shall be set up which nothing can break."

At this moment a step rung in the outer halls of the cavern, not the way from which they had come, but in the opposite direction, and a man came in hurriedly. He was a pompous looking individual, country squire all over, a fat, unctuous, greasy hypocrite, if there was ever one upon the face of the earth.

"Glad to see you, squire," said Paul, eagerly. "The boys and I have had a little misunderstanding, and it requires you to settle it. I am going to be married, and I want you to perform the ceremony."

"By all means, by all means, my dear Captain. 'Happy to be of service to you in any way. But who is the bride?"

The Captain turned suddenly and laid his hand upon the shoulder of the prisoner.

"Here," he said, quietly. "My dear girl, rise. We are going to be married here and now."

CHAPTER XIV.

WITNESSES AT THE WEDDING—A VILLAIN'S DOOM.

A WILD cry broke from the lips of the prisoner and she sprang up, the jaunty hat falling from her head as she did so, and the clustering locks dropped upon her shoulders.

"Miss Marian Lynn, gentlemen," said the Captain. "She has taken it upon herself to masquerade in this garb, and has no one to blame but herself if she is caught in her own trap."

"Yes, Marian Lynn," she cried. "I appeal to you, gentlemen, to protect me from the insults of this man."

"No insult is intended," replied Forsythe. "In this garb you have surprised our secrets, and no one can leave here who has not been bound to us in some way. Squire Thompson, you have no objection to performing the ceremony?"

"Not at all, since it is for the interest of all concerned," said the squire, in his smooth, oily voice. "I understand that you have long been engaged lovers, and under the circumstances, it seems the only way out of the difficulty."

"But we are not engaged, Mr. Thompson, and I would sooner die than be his wife."

"Tush, tush; lovers' quarrels, lovers' quarrels," replied the squire. "You will get over that feeling when you are once safely married, and it is better so; for, since the death of your father, you have no natural protector. I am ready to go on when you are, Captain."

"Do you tell me, Squire Thompson, that you would dare to go on with this marriage in the face of what I have said. You are a villain, if you do it."

"Now, now, now; Marian, Marian! You know that I am an old friend of your father's, and I am sure, that, if he were living he would say that you would be better under the care of a good husband. Therefore I shall go on with the ceremony, satisfied in my own heart that I am right."

"I will not endure it," she cried. "Is there not one in all this party who is man enough to aid me?"

There was a slight murmur among the men, and they looked at one another in silent commiseration. But they knew that, for the safety of their vile gang, something must be done to bind her, and they could think of nothing better than this.

"Let us end this," cried the Captain, seizing her hand and clasping her about the waist. "Go on, squire, we are ready."

"Help! help!" she cried, striking him in the face with her open hand. "You villain, you base wretch, take your hand from me!"

He only laughed bitterly and held her more tightly.

"You are a tiger-cat, my dear," he said, "but I can tame you. Now, squire."

"Don't you want a few witnesses?" said a quiet voice at the entrance of the passage by which the squire had come. "If you do, I can furnish them."

All turned in utter confusion, and there, standing at the entrance to the passage, his arms folded on his breast, but holding a revolver in each hand, was Lieutenant Walters, who had tracked Squire Thompson to the haunt.

With wild cries two of the outlaws darted at the gallant man. He extended his right hand, and the revolver cracked twice. The two threw up their arms and dropped before the well-directed aim.

Clustering in the passage behind the Lieutenant could be seen the forms of the men who had been left behind with Walters in the pass. A cry of joy was heard from the lips of Marian Lynn.

"Out of the way there," cried Paul Forsythe, releasing his hold upon the arm of the girl and drawing a weapon. "Come about me, lads; we will drive these dogs back whence they came. At them, one and all!"

They knew that their cause was desperate, and unless they could drive out Walters and his men there was no hope for them. And they were desperate men, ready to take their lives in their hands at any time. They had followed Paul Forsythe in many a bloody fray, and they did not fail him now.

With wild cheers they dashed at the waiting Vigilantes, who met them boldly, and for a moment held them back. But their numbers

were much less than those of the outlaws, and they were pressed back, fighting bravely, into the wider passage, where the battle became more desperate than ever. Man by man they dropped on either side, dead and wounded. The bullets rattled like hailstones against the sides of the cavern. The walls rung with the shots and shouts of the desperate men. But numbers began to prevail, and the Vigilantes were forced back, contesting every inch of the ground. Walters, in the van, bleeding from half a dozen wounds, yet fought like a demon, and his manly voice rung out, more feebly than at first, but not the less heartily.

"Stand up to it, boys," he cried. "Give them Bunker Hill, Hail Columbia, and all the rest of it. Think of the girl; fight for Marian Lynn and Colonel Steyne. Hurra!"

A ball from the revolver of Paul Forsythe pierced his heart, and with that wild hurrah he fell dead at the head of his men.

"They waver," cried the outlaw Captain. "Charge again, boys; we'll teach them to rouse up the Moonshine Men in their own domain."

The Vigilantes began to shake as their numbers grew less and their gallant leader fell. They were pressed back faster now, and out upon the ledge before the entrance to the cave. All hope seemed over, and Marian, struggling in the grasp of the two men left to guard her, felt her heart sink in her bosom as she saw her defenders weaken and fall back. She exerted herself to the utmost to free herself, but they held her fast, laughing at her futile efforts, when suddenly the roof above them began to rain men. Down through the opening, ten feet above their heads, bounded an armed man, a knife in his teeth, a revolver in each hand, and she knew Edgar Steyne! Then came Old Rube, bounding like a ball as he struck the floor. Then a great dog leaped down, and with a savage howl hurled himself desperately upon the two men who held Marian Lynn. With yells of terror they broke away, leaving her to herself.

"Out of the way, Marian," cried Edgar Steyne. "They will be fighting here in a moment."

"Take keer of her, Lion," cried Old Rube. "Now boys, sail in."

And they furiously attacked the outlaws in the narrow pass. Just as the Vigilantes in front were giving up hope, and were about to flee. The brave dog instead of taking further part in the fray, crouched at the feet of the girl, giving her a look from his great humid eyes which told that he meant to defend her, if need be, to the very death.

Taken by surprise by this sudden and furious assault coming as it did from an unlooked-for quarter and that too in the moment of victory, it is no wonder that the outlaws, for the time being, lost heart. But there was no hope of escape, and they saw that their only chance lay in breaking through their enemies in the rear and taking refuge in one of the interior caves, the secret of which they only knew. Turning upon their new foes, and caring nothing for those who had so long held them at bay, they fiercely charged the enemy in their rear, and with superhuman valor, for the time being, actually drove them back into the lighted cave.

Then, for the first time, Paul Forsythe realized how awfully his numbers had been thinned in the fight with Walters and his men. Of eighty men who had commenced the fight, scarcely thirty, and some of these badly wounded, were upon their feet. Opposed to him were fifty fresh men and over twenty of the followers of Walters, already preparing to assume the offensive. There was little hope for them, and in the mutual pause which both parties made the outlaw realized that he could only hope to sell his life dearly and make his end as fatal as he could to the enemy he hated. Glaring about him, his savage eyes rested upon the form of Marian Lynn, seated upon the bowlder, with the dog crouching at her feet.

"Hold on!" he cried, hoarsely, extending his hand toward Ed Steyne, who stood leaning forward ready to spring upon the outlaws. "I don't keer by whose treachery you came here, but that there is a traitor somewhere, I know well. You have run us to earth, curse you, and there is nothing now but to die. But be that as it may, I die game. And for you, Marian Lynn, you, who pretended once to love me and then turned against me for this spy, you shall not live to triumph over me."

And, with a terrible cry, he made a tiger-like leap at the shrinking girl, whirling his knife above his head. Two or three raised their pistols, but they dared not take the risk of killing her.

"Get out, Lion!" yelled Old Rube. "Watch out!"

The huge dog rose into the air, and he launched himself like an arrow straight at the throat of the outlaw. Vain was his vaunted strength and skill at that moment. There was a gurgling cry, a smothered groan, and Marian covered her face with her hands to shut out the awful sight, and there lay Paul Forsythe, silent and dead under the powerful jaws of the dog.

"We weaken," said one of the outlaws, throwing down his weapon. "For God's sake, call off the dog."

"Hyer, Lion," cried Old Rube. "Take up the gal, kernel; don't you see she's fainted?"

Edgar Steyne sprang forward, caught her in his arms, and carried her out into the open air. And there, under the clear sunlight he pressed his lips to those of the girl he loved so well, and had won at such a price.

The blow to moonshining was fatal, and to this day people speak with bated breath of the awful struggle for life or death in the mountain cave. They buried the dead Moonshiners in Wolf's Glen, into which the cave debouched, and they slept peacefully, their errors forgiven by those who had suffered most at their hands.

Edgar Steyne had done his work well, and from that hour was a hero in the valley, and the Moonshiners learned to hide their stills and lay low when Marshal Steyne rode their way. He married the girl who had saved his life in the quicksands, and they made a noble couple. Old Rube saw them married, and went back to his mountain home. But, when Colonel Steyne has work to do—and the Moonshiners are not all dead yet—the first man he calls on is the old graybeard, who leaves his faithful dog to guard his cabin and comes down to aid the man he delights to follow.

At times Marian Steyne is pensive, and sits by her happy fireside with a dreamy look in her eyes. And at such times her husband knows that she is thinking of the awful time when they fought for life or death beneath the mountains. And she has even a kindly hope for that misguided man, who, evil as he was, loved her but too well.

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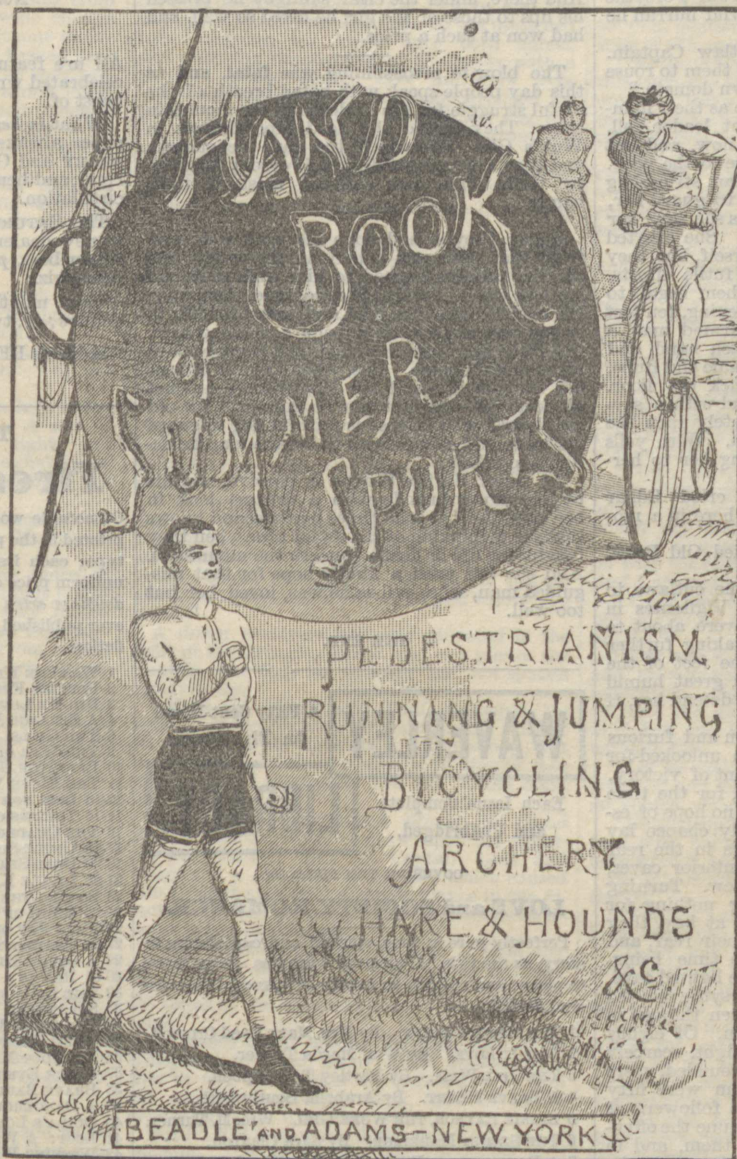
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